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THE PAGANS

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LOS ANGELES

BY

ARLO BATES

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, IV. 3.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1899

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DEDICATION.

To those who would be Pagans, did any such organization exist, I take pleasure in offering this attempt to picture a phase of life which they know.

2061752

She answered, "cast thy rosary on the ground; bind on thy shoulder the thread of paganism; throw stones at the glass of piety; and quaff from a full goblet."

Persian Religious Hymn.

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THE PAGANS.

I.

SOME SPEECH OF MARRIAGE.

Measure for Measure, v—i.

A FINE, drizzling rain was striking against the windows of a cosy third floor sitting-room, obscuring what in pleasant weather was a fine distant view of the Charles river. The apartment was evidently that of a woman, as numerous details of arrangement and articles of feminine use suggested; and quite as evidently it was the home of a person of taste and refinement, and of one, too, who had traveled.

Arthur Fenton, a slender young artist, with elegant figure and deep set eyes, was lounging in an easy chair in an attitude well calculated to show to advantage his graceful outlines. For occupation he was turning over a portfolio of sketches, whose authorship was indicated by the attitude of the lady seated near by.

She was a woman of commanding presence, with full lips, whose expression was contradicted by the almost haughty carriage of her fine head

and the keen glance of her eye, which indicated too much character for the mere pleasure-seeker. Her hair was of a rich chestnut, and she wore a dress of steel gray cashmere, relieved at the throat by a knot of pale orange, which harmonized admirably with her clear complexion. She watched her companion as if secretly anxious for his good opinion of her drawings, yet too proud to betray any feeling in the matter. He, for his part, turned them over with seeming listlessness, breaking out now and then with some abrupt remark.

"Yes," he said suddenly, after a ten minutes' silence, "I'm going to be married at once. It will be 'a marriage in the bush,' as the Suabians call an impecunious match, since neither of us has any money; and I, at least, haven't so great a superfluity of brains that in this intelligent age of the world I am ever likely to make much by selling myself; and that is the only way any body gets any money nowadays."

"I hardly think you'd be willing to sell," his companion answered, "no matter how good the market."

"There's where you are wrong," he answered, looking up with a sudden frown, "the worst thing about me is that with sufficient inducement—or even merely from the temptation of an especially good opportunity—I should sell myself body and soul to the Philistines."

"One would hardly fancy it, from the way you talk of Peter Calvin and his followers."

"Oh, as to that," retorted the artist, "don't you see that judicious opposition increases my market value when I am ready to sell? If I could only be sufficiently prominent in my antagonism, I might absolutely fix my own price."

The lady made no answer, but regarded him more intently than ever.

"That's a good thing," he broke out again, holding up a drawing. "Why don't you do that in marble, or better still, in bronze?"

"I am putting it up in clay," she answered. "I thought I had shown it to you. It is to be fired as my first experiment in a big piece of terra-cotta. That is the first sketch; I think I have improved upon it."

It was the study for a bas-relief representing the months, twelve characteristic figures running forward with the utmost speed. Gifts dropped from their hands as they ran; from the fingers of June fell flowers, from those of August and September ripened fruits, upon which November and December trampled ruthlessly. January, in his haste, overturned an altar against which February stumbles.

"It is melancholy enough," Fenton observed, regarding it closely. "How melancholy every thing is now-a-days?"

"To a man about to be married?" she asked, with a fine smile.

"Oh, always to me. The fact that I am going to be married does not prevent my still being myself."

"Unfortunately not," she returned, with a faint suspicion of sarcasm in her tone. "You pique yourself upon being somber."

"I dare say," answered he, a trifle petulantly. "Pain has become a habit with me; discontent is about the only luxury I can afford, heaven knows!"

"Unless it is gorgeous cravats."

"Oh, that," Fenton said, putting his hand to the blue and gold tie at his throat. "I'm trying to furbish up my old body and decrepit heart against my nuptials, so I invested fifty cents in this tie."

"You couldn't have done it cheaper," remarked she; "though, perhaps," she added dryly, "it is all the rejuvenation is worth."

Fenton smiled grimly and again applied himself to the examination of the drawings, while the other looked out at the rain.

"Boston has more climate, and that far worse," she remarked, "than any other known locality."

"Does that mean that you are going to Herman's this afternoon?" asked Fenton.

"I should have gone this morning if you had not insisted upon my wasting my time simply because you had determined to waste yours."

Fenton laughed.

"You are frank to a guest," he said. "I wished to be congratulated on my marriage."

"I shall not congratulate you," she answered. "You are spoiled. The women have petted you too much."

"According to the old fairy tale all goes well with the man of whom the women are fond."

"I remember," she said. "I always pitied their wives."

"I shall treat Edith well."

"You are too good-natured not to, I suppose; especially when you look forward to your marriage with such rapture."

"But, Helen, have I ever pretended to believe in marriage? Marriage is a crime! Think of the wretched folly of those who talk of the holiness of love's being protected by the sanctities of marriage. If love is holy, let it have way; if it is not, all the sacraments priests can devise cannot sanctify it."

"Then why, Arthur, do you marry at all?"

"Because marriage is a necessary evil as society is at present constituted."

"But," Helen said slowly, "you who pretend to have so little regard for society—"

"Ah, there it is," he interrupted. "Man is gregarious by instinct; he must do as his fellows do. He must submit to the most absurd *convenances* of his fellowmen, as one sheep jumps where an-

other did though the bar be taken away. If he were strong enough to stand alone he might take conventions by the throat and be a god!"

His outburst was too vehement and sudden not to come from some underlying current of deep feeling, rather than from the present conversation. He had risen while speaking, his head thrown back, his eyes sparkling. His companion regarded him with admiration, not unmixed, however, with amusement.

"And you," she said, "choose to call yourself a man without enthusiasms."

"Yes," replied he, smiling and regaining his seat, "I am a man without enthusiasms."

"That is the cleverest thing you ever said," Helen continued, musingly. "And so we understand you intend to be ruled by conventionality and marry?"

"Precisely; it would be unjust to Edith to even talk to her of my views."

"I should hope so!" exclaimed his hostess. "But you will at least have her to yourself, and that pays for every thing."

"Oh, *peutêtre!*" Fenton returned dubiously, perfectly well aware that the remark had been made to elicit comment, yet too fond of talking to resist temptation and leave it unanswered, "*peutêtre*, though I never believed in the desert-island theory. It is more in your line; you still have faith in it."

"Oh, I do," she rejoined quickly; "and so

would you if you were in love. You'd be content to be on a rock in the mid ocean if she were there."

"Love on a desert island," returned the young man, smiling significantly; "Oh, *le premier jour, c'est bon; le deuxième jour, ce n'est pas si bon; le troisième jour—mon Dieu, mais comment on s'ennuie!*"

"No, no, no," Helen broke in impetuously. "Good, always! Always, always, or never!"

Fenton threw back his head and burst into a shout of laughter.

> "'Twere errant folly to presume,
> Love's flame could burn and not consume,"

he sang, going off again into peals of laughter. "Good by, *mon amie;* oh, *mais comment on s'en—*"

"Stop," interrupted she. "I'll have no more blasphemy."

"Good-by, then," he said, picking up his hat.

"You may as well stay to lunch," his hostess said rising.

"No," returned he. "I must go and write to Edith."

And off he went, humming:

> "'Twere errant folly to presume
> Love's flame could burn and not consume."

II.

THE HEAVY MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

Measure for Measure ; iv—1.

AS many of the Boston clocks as ever permitted themselves so far to break through their constitutional reserve as to speak above a whisper, had announced in varying tones that it was midnight, yet the group of men seated in easy attitudes before the fire in one of the sitting-rooms of the St. Filipe Club showed no signs of breaking up. Indeed, the room was so pleasant and warm, with its artistically combined colors, its good pictures and glowing grates, and the storm outside raged so savagely, beating its wind and sleet against the windows, that a reluctance to issue from the club-house door was only natural, and there would be little room for surprise should the men conclude to remain where they were until daylight.

The conversation, carried on amid clouds of fragrant tobacco smoke and with potations, not excessive but comfortably frequent, was quiet and unflagging, possessing, for the most part, that mellow quality which is seldom attained before the small hours and the third cigar.

"Yes, virtue has to be its own reward," Tom

Bently was saying lightly, "for, don't you see, the people who practice it are too narrow-minded to appreciate any thing else."

"And that makes it the most poorly paid of all the professions," was the retort of Fred Rangely, who was lounging in a big easy chair; "except literature, that is. Even sin is said to get death for its wage, and that is something."

"Virtue may be an inestimable prize for any thing you newspaper men can tell. It is not a commodity you are used to handling."

"Literature has little to do with virtue, it is true," was the response. "Who would read a novel about virtuous people, for instance? I'd as soon study the catechism."

"How art has to occupy itself with iniquity," Fenton observed with a philosophical puff of his cigar. "Or what people call iniquity; though a truer definition would be nature."

"Painting occupies itself with iniquity in its models," Rangely said lazily. "I heard to-day—"

"No scandals," interrupted Grant Herman, good humoredly. "You are going to tell the story about Flackerman, I know."

The speaker was the most noticeable man in the group. Tom Bently, an artist, was a tall, swarthy fellow with thin black beard, stubble-like hair, and a gypsyish look. Next came Fred Rangely, an author of some reputation, of whom his friends expected great things, rather short in

stature, thick-set, and with a good-tempered, intelligent face. Fenton's appearance has already been touched upon; he was of elegant figure, with a face intellectual, high-bred, but marred by a suspicion of superciliousness. Amid these friends, Herman gained something by contrast with each and naturally became the center of the group. This prominence was partly due to his figure, of large mold, finely formed and firmly knit, carrying always an air of restful strength and composure which made itself felt in whatever company he found himself. His head, although not out of proportion with his fine shoulders and trunk, was somewhat massive, a fact which was emphasized a little by the profusion of his locks, now plentifully sprinkled with gray. His face was indicative of much character, the lips firm and full, the eyes large and dark, now serious under their heavy brows and now twinkling with contagious merriment.

"It isn't every model you can talk scandal about," chuckled Bently, in reply to Herman's remark. "We had a devilishly pretty fuss in Nick Featherstone's studio the other day. Nick found his match in the new model."

"What new model?" inquired Fenton, arranging himself into an effective pose before the fire.

"Do you remember the picture of an Italian girl that Tom Demming sent to the Academy ex-

hibition two years ago? A homely face with lots of character in it, and a splendid pose?"

"You mean the one he called *Marietta?* It was well done, if I remember."

"Oh, stunningly. That's the girl. She's just landed, and Demming gave her letters to me. She's a staving good model!"

"But she isn't pretty."

"No; but she is suggestive. She has one of those faces that you can make all sorts of things out of. Rollins made a sketch of her head that is stunning; a lovely thing; and it looked like her too. Then her figure is perfect, and what is more, she knows how to pose. She meets an idea half way, you know, and hits the expression wonderfully. She has given me points for my picture every time she has been at the studio."

"Is her name Ninitta?" Grant Herman asked.

"Yes; do you know any thing about her?"

"I think I've seen her in Rome. But what is she doing on this side of the water?"

To Arthur Fenton's keen perception there seemed more feeling in the tone than an inquiry into the affairs of a stranger would be likely to evoke, but he gave the matter no especial thought.

"Yes," he echoed lightly, "what is she here for? There is no art in this country. New York is the home of barbarism and Boston of Philistinism; while Cincinnati is a chromo imitation of both. She'd better have staid abroad."

"Your remark is true, Arthur," Bently laughed, "if it isn't very relevant. What people in this country want isn't art at all, but what some Great Panjandrum or other abroad has labeled art. They don't know what is good."

"That is so true," was the retort, "that I almost wonder they don't buy your pictures, Tom."

"But why does the girl come to America?" persisted Herman, with a faint trace of irritation in his tone. "She could do far better at home."

"Oh, Demming wrote that she was bound to come. You can never tell what ails a woman anyhow. Probably she has a lover over here somewhere."

Herman made no reply save by an involuntary lowering of his heavy brows, and Rangely brought the conversation back to its starting-point by asking:

"But what about Nick Featherstone?"

"Oh, Nick? Well, Nick tried to kiss her yesterday, and she offered to stab him with some sort of a devilish dagger arrangement she carries about like an opera heroine."

"Featherstone is always a strong temptation to an honest man's boot," growled Herman out of his beard, as he sat with his head sunk upon his breast, staring into the fire.

"They had a scene that wouldn't have done discredit to a first-class opera-bouffe company," Bently went on, laughing at the remembrance.

"Nick was fool enough to hollo to somebody in the next room, and the result was that we all came trooping in like a chorus. It was absurd enough."

And he laughed afresh.

"But the girl?" persisted Grant Herman, not removing his gaze from the fire. "How did she take it?"

"Oh, she was as calm and cold as you please. She gathered herself together and went off without any fuss."

"I wish when you are done with her, you'd send her round to me," Herman rejoined. "I want a model for a figure, and if I remember her, she'll do capitally."

He rose as he spoke, with the air of a man who intends going home.

"By the way," Fenton said to him, "isn't the Pagan night next week? Don't you have it this month?"

"Yes; you'll get your invitations sometime or other. Good night all."

"Oh, don't break good company," Rangely remonstrated. "I have half a bottle here, and I do hate an alcoholic soliloquy."

But the movement for departure was general, and in a few moments more the members of the company were wending their individual ways homeward through the pelting rain.

III.

THE SHOT OF ACCIDENT.

Othello; iv.—1.

THE sun shone brightly in at the windows of a little bare studio next morning, as if to atone for the gloom of the darkness and storm of the night. The Midas touch of its rays fell upon the hair of Helen Greyson, turning its wavy locks into gold as she softly sang over her modeling.

She seemed to find in her work a joy which accorded well with the bright day. Pinned to the wall was an improved sketch of the bas-relief whose design had attracted Fenton's notice in her portfolio, while before the artist stood a copy in clay, upon which she was working with those mysterious touches which to the uninitiated are mere meaningless dabs, yet under which the figures were growing into sightliness and beauty.

Suddenly her song was interrupted by the sound of footsteps without, followed by a tap upon her door.

"Come," she called; and Grant Herman entered in response to the invitation

He carried in his arms a large vase, about

whose sides green and golden dragons coiled themselves in fantastic relief.

"Your vase came from the kiln," he said, "and I knew you would want to see it at once. It is the most successful firing they have done here."

"Oh, I am so glad," she returned, laying down her modeling tools, and approaching him eagerly. "I was sure there wouldn't be a head or a tail left by the time the poor monsters came out of the fiery furnace. What a splendid color that back is! And that golden fin is gorgeous."

"Yes, Mrs. Greyson," Herman said, "you have produced a veritable dragon's brood this time. I can almost hear them hiss."

"Do you know," she responded, smoothing the glittering shapes with half chary touches. "I should not be wholly willing to have the vase in my room at night. They might, you know, come to life and go gliding about in a ghastly way."

"I always wondered," the sculptor observed, "that Eve had the courage to talk with the serpent. Do you suppose she squealed when she saw him?"

"Oh, no, she probably divined that mischief was brewing, and that contented her."

Herman had set the vase where all its gorgeous hues were brought out by the sun, which sparkled and danced upon every spine and scale of the writhing monsters. He walked away from it to observe the effect at a greater distance.

"There is no pleasure like that of creating," he said. "Man is a god when he can look on his work and pronounce it good."

"Which is seldom," she returned, "unless in the one instant after its completion when we still see what we intended rather than what we have made."

"It is fortunate our work cannot rise up to reproach us for the wide difference between our intents and our performances. Fancy one of my statues taking me to task because it hasn't the glory it had in my brain."

"It is on that account," Mrs. Greyson said smiling, "that I fancy Galatea must have been most uncomfortable to live with. Whenever Pygmalion found fault, she had always the retort ready: 'At least I am exactly what you chose to make me.' Poor Pygmalion!"

"It was no more true than in the case of every man that marries; we all bow down to ideals, I suppose. Except," he added with a little hesitation, "myself, of course."

The words were somewhat awkward in the hesitating accent which gave them a suggestiveness at which the faintest of flushes mounted to her cheek. She bent her observations more closely on the vase.

"It is fired so much better than the last miserable failure," observed she, going to a shelf and reaching after a dusty vase, massive and fantastic, which had been ruined in the kiln.

"Let me help you," Herman said.

But she had already loosened the vase, which proved heavier than she expected, and it was only by darting forward, and throwing his arms about her, that the sculptor was enabled to save her from a severe blow. The vase fell crashing to the floor, breaking into heavy shards, rattling the windows and the casts upon the wall by the concussion.

An exclamation escaped him. He had drawn Mrs. Greyson backward, and for a brief instant, held her in his strong clasp. It was an accident which to mere acquaintances might mean nothing; to lovers, every thing. Herman was for a moment pale with the fear that Helen might be injured; then the hot blood surged into his cheeks as he released his hold and stepped back. He bent over the fragments of the vase that she might not see his face, and by so doing, as he reflected afterward, he failed to perceive what was her expression. He straightened himself with an impetuous movement, and came a step nearer.

"How can you be so careless?" he demanded, almost with irritation. "It might have killed you."

"I did not remember that it was so heavy," she returned, a little pale and panting. "Do you think I was trying to pull it on my head? I am very much obliged, though. You have saved me a heavy blow at least. There is not much

left of that unlucky vase. It was always ill-starred."

"All's well that ends well," returned the sculptor, sufficiently recovering his self-control to speak lightly; "only don't run such a risk another time."

"Oh, I assure you," she replied, "I do not make my vases either to break my head or to be broken themselves. I shall take better care of this one, you may be confident."

"I was more concerned for yourself than for the vase."

"For myself it really does not so much matter."

"It is scarcely kind to your friends to say so."

"Oh,—my friends!"

Over her face came an inexplicable expression, which might be gloom or exultation, and the tone in which she spoke was equally difficult of interpretation. She seemed determined, however, to fall into no snares of speech; she smiled upon the sculptor with a glance at once radiant and perplexing.

She turned towards the new vase and began slowly to whirl the modeling-stand upon which Herman had placed it. A thousand reflections danced and flickered about the little room as it revolved in the sunlight, glowing and glittering like the sparkles from a carcanet of jewels. The fiery monsters seemed to twine and coil in living motion as the light shone upon their emerald and golden scales and bristling spines.

"I wonder if Eve's serpent was so splendid," Mrs. Greyson laughed, twirling the stand yet faster upon its pivot. "Would I do for Mother Eve, do you think?"

"If the power to tempt a man be the test," he retorted with an odd brusqueness quite disproportionate to the apparent lightness of the occasion, the dark blood mantling his face, "there can be no doubt of it."

A swift change came over her at his words. She left the vase and stand abruptly. She flushed crimson, then grew pale and looked about her with a half frightened glance, as if uncertain which way to turn. The movement touched her companion as no words could have done.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered.

And with a still deeper flush on his swarthy cheek he turned abruptly and quitted the room.

IV.

AFTER SUCH A PAGAN CUT.

Henry VIII.; i.—3.

"IN the first place," said Edith Caldwell brightly, "you know, Arthur, that I ought not to be in Boston at all, when I have so much to see to at home; and in the second place Aunt Calvin is shocked at the unconventionality of my being seen any where in public after the wedding-cards are out; but I was determined to see this picture. I saw it when he had just begun it in Paris, you know, three years ago."

"As for being seen," Arthur Fenton returned, "we certainly shall never be seen here. The Art Museum is the most solitary place in the city; and as for conventionalities, why, the wedding is so quiet and so far off that I think nobody here even realizes that the stupendous event is imminent at all."

"Oh, but I do," Edith said, laughing and clasping her hands with a pretty gesture of mock despair. "I feel that the day of my bondage is advancing with unfaltering tread, like the day of doom."

"Then you should do as I do by the day of doom, disbelieve in it altogether until it comes."

"It is of no use. Even disbelief will not alter the almanac, as you'll find when the day of doom swoops down on you."

They were sitting upon one of the hard benches in the picture-gallery of the Art Museum before an important work just sent over from Europe by its American purchaser. The afternoon light was beginning to be a little dim, and Edith was troubled with the consciousness that the errands which had brought her for the day to Boston were far from being accomplished. It was pleasant to linger, however, especially as this might be the last tranquil day she should pass with Arthur before their marriage.

She rose from her seat and crossed to the picture of Millet representing a peasant girl with a distaff of flax in her hand. Fenton sat a moment looking after his betrothed, critically though fondly, then with a deliberate movement he left his seat and followed her.

"Think of the distance between this country and that picture," he remarked, regarding the beautiful canvas. "Art in America is simply an irreclaimable mendicant that stands on the street corners and holds out the catch-penny hand of a beggar."

"Oh, no," Miss Caldwell replied, turning her clear glance to his, "that is only an impostor that pretends to be art. The real goddess has her temples here."

"Yes," returned he, with a laugh that covered a sneer, "but not in the way you mean."

A shadow passed over her face; she turned a wistful glance towards him.

"I cannot understand, Arthur," she said, "why you speak so bitterly about art here. Of course, all great men are apt to be misunderstood at first, but you—"

"I am over estimated," he interrupted, inly vexed at having given the conversation this turn. "It is only for the sake of talking, *ma petite*. Don't mind it."

"But, Arthur," she persisted, "I want to say something. Uncle Peter talks as if you sided with the artists here who—who—"

She was wholly at a loss to phrase what she wished to say, both because her ideas were rather vague and because she feared lest she might offend her lover by talking upon a subject which he had markedly avoided. He made now a fresh effort to divert the talk into a new channel.

"Never mind the artists," he said, "we really must go. Besides, you are only in town for a day and it is no use to attempt the discussion of questions which involve the entire order of the universe. I promised Mrs. Calvin I'd bring you back in half-an-hour, and we've been here twice that time already."

He ran on brightly and rapidly, leading the way out of the gallery and down the stairs, and she

followed with a suspicion of shadow upon her face as if the subject of which she had spoken was one of real importance to her.

"Come in and see the jolly old Pasht," Arthur suggested, as they descended the wide staircase.

She acquiesced by turning with him into the room devoted to the Way collection of Egyptian antiquities, in the center of which stands a somewhat mutilated granite statue of the goddess Pasht, the cat-headed deity, referred to the time of Amenophis III, about 1500 B.C. Calm, impassive and saturnine the goddess sits, holding the sign of life with lifeless fingers in as unconscious mockery now as when the symbol was placed within the stony grasp by some unrecorded sculptor dead more than thirty centuries ago. All that it has looked upon, all the shifting scenes and varied lands upon which have gazed those sightless eyes, have left no record on that emotionless face, whose lips still keep unchanged their faint smile beneath which lurks a sneer.

Arthur and Edith stood before it, as a pair of Egyptian lovers may have stood long ago, and for a time regarded it in silence, each moved in a way, though very differently, as their temperaments differed.

"It is the patron saint of our Pagans," the artist said at length. "How much the old creature knows, if she only chose to tell. She could give us more genuine wisdom than we shall hear in our

whole lives, if she would but condescend to speak."

"Wisdom always knows the value of silence," Edith returned smiling.

"But Pasht belies her sex by not being a communicative party," was her companion's reply; "although communicativeness was never a characteristic of the gods."

"No irreverence, sir," Edith said with an air of mock authority, "even for these dethroned deities. What were the attributes of your cat-headed goddess?"

"Oh, various things. Pasht means, I believe, the devouring one, and she has another name signifying 'she who kindles a fire.' She was the goddess of war and of libraries, and the 'mistress of thought.' A sort of Egyptian Minerva, I suppose."

"Violence and wisdom always seemed to me a strange combination," Edith said thoughtfuliy, regarding the stone image intently, as if to drag from its cold lips a solution of the difficulty.

"You overlook the destructive power of words; besides, the sword or the tongue, what does it matter? Life is always a conflict, and it is of minor importance what the weapons are. It is appropriate enough for this dilapidated, but eminently respectable female to be the figure-head of a society like the Pagans where we fight with words but may come to blows any time."

He spoke gayly, pleased with having put entirely

out of the conversation the unpleasant subject of his relations to her uncle, Mr. Peter Calvin, upon which Edith had touched. But he who talks with a woman must expect the unexpected, and as they turned away from the statue of Pasht, and walked towards the street where the carriage was waiting, Miss Caldwell abruptly brought the matter up again by asking:

"But why are you artists opposed to Uncle Peter, Arthur? What is the——"

"The Pagans, *ma belle*," he interrupted coolly, quite as if he were answering her question, although in reality nothing was further from his intention, "isn't really a society at all. It is only the name by which we've taken to calling a knot of fellows who meet once a month in each other's studios. We are all St. Filipe men, but we've no organization as a club."

"Well?" Edith asked, as he paused; evidently puzzled to discover any connection between her question and his reply.

"And you," her betrothed responded, tucking her into the carriage and surreptitiously kissing her hand, "are the loveliest of your sex. I'll come to take you to the depot at six, you know. Good-by."

He closed the carriage door, watched her drive off, and then went his own way.

V.

THE BITTER PAST.

All's Well that Ends Well ; v.—3.

"The Pagans: Friday, Jan. 17.
Pipes, pictures and punch.
GRANT HERMAN."

SUCH was the invitation received one day by each of the Pagans, under a seal bearing the impress of the goddess Pasht.

There is little that need be added to Fenton's account of the Pagans. The society had no organization beyond a rule to meet each month and to limit its membership to seven ; no especial principles beyond an unformulated although by no means unexpressed antagonism against Philistinism. Fenton had suggested Pasht as a sort of *dea mater*, and had furnished the seal bearing the image of that goddess which it was customary to use upon the notifications of meetings ; and for the rest there was nothing definite to distinguish this group of earnest and sometimes fiery young men from any other. They doubtless said a great many foolish things, but they did so many wise ones that it seemed but reasonable to assume that there must be some grains of wisdom mingled

with whatever dross was to be found in their speech.

Their views were extreme enough. Fenton was fond of maintaining astounding propositions, using the club much as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once privately said Wendell Phillips does the community, "to try the strength of extravagant theories;" and none of the Pagans were restrained by any conventionality from a free expression of opinion.

It was on the afternoon of the day fixed for the Pagan meeting when Helen Greyson took her way across the Common and through the business portion of the city to the building down by the wharves where were the studios of Herman and his pupils. It was feebly raining, the weather having been decidedly whimsical all that week, and the clouds rolled in ragged, sullen masses overhead. Helen felt the gloom of the day as a vague depression which she endeavored in vain to shake off, and hastened towards her studio, hoping to be able to lose herself in her work.

Picking her steps among the piles of fire-brick and terra-cotta which lumbered the yard and the long shed skirting the building, which was a terra-cotta manufactory, she let herself in at a side door and went directly to her studio.

Removing the wet cloths from her bas-relief, she stood for a moment studying it, and then investing herself in a great apron, set busily to

work upon one of the fleeting figures in the composition.

She had scarcely begun when as often before a heavy step was heard upon the stair without, a tap sounded lightly upon her door, and, in answer to her invitation, Grant Herman entered.

He, too, had evidently been working in clay, of which his loose blouse bore abundant marks. A paper cap, not unlike that of a pastry-cook in an English picture, was stuck a little aslant over his iron gray locks, giving him a certain roguish air, with which the occasional twinkle in his eye harmonized well.

"Good morning, Mrs. Greyson," he said in his hearty voice, and then stood for a moment looking over her shoulder at her work in silence.

"Do you think the movement of that figure too violent?" his pupil asked, turning to look up at him, and noticing for the first time that despite the saucy pose of his cap, the sculptor was evidently not in the best of spirits.

"No," returned he, rather absently. "But you must have less agitation in the robe; it is merely hurried now, not swift. Lengthen and simplify those folds—so."

As he indicated the desired curves with his nervous fingers, Mrs. Greyson's quick eye caught sight of a striking ring upon his hand, and without thought she said, involuntarily:

"You have a new ring!"

"Yes," returned Herman, flushing; "or rather a very old one. It is an intaglio that the artist Hoffmeir—I have told you of our friendship in Rome—gave me one Christmas. I returned it to him when I left Rome, and at his death he in turn sent it back to me."

"But Hoffmeir has been dead several years."

"More than six; but the ring has just come into my hands."

The intaglio was a dark sard beautifully cut with the head of Minerva, and Mrs. Greyson's artistic instincts were keenly alive to the exquisite delicacy of its workmanship. She inquired something of its origin and probable age, and then dropped it from her attention, save that, being a woman, she wondered a little what was the personal bearing of this token, and whether the sculptor's sadness arose from the awakening of memories connected with it.

"It must seem like a token from the grave," she said, "coming as it does, so long after Hoffmeir's death."

"It does," the other replied, soberly; "but it brought a message with it. Oh, the wretchedness of hearing a voice from the dead, to whom you can send no answer!"

The burst of emotion with which he said this was very unusual, and Mrs. Greyson regarded him with perhaps as much surprise as sympathy, having never before seen him so deeply moved.

"I am afraid," she ventured, hesitatingly, "that what I said seemed intrusive, though of course it was not meant to be."

"It did not seem so; but I am out of sorts this afternoon. I have sent my model away because I am too much unstrung to work."

"I hope nothing bad has happened," said Helen, quickly.

"No, nothing; it's only this message from dear old Hoffmeir."

He walked away and pulled aside the curtain which screened the lower half of the window overlooking the water, and stood gazing out at a vessel lying beside the wharf beneath. Mrs. Greyson laid down her modeling tools, disturbed by the other's disquiet, and wondering how best to distract his attention from himself. Her glance roved inquiringly about the little room, noting every cast upon the dingy walls, bits of sculptured foliage, architectural forms, and portions of the human figure. Then her gaze rested an instant upon her own work, and from that turned toward the robust form by the window.

"Come, Mr. Herman," she said at length, in a tone half jesting, "I never saw you so somber."

"It is not that Hoffmeir is dead, poor fellow!" Herman replied, answering her unspoken question. "I'd made up my mind to endure that, and any man with his over-sensitive temperament is better

off on the other side of the grass than this any day. I may as well tell you, Mrs. Greyson, though as a rule I do not find much comfort in blurting out things. The fact is that Hoffmeir and I quarreled over a girl. We were both in love with her, like two young fools as we were; but she'd promised to marry me, and—it was a deal better that she didn't, too. I thought he tried to take her from me. Now I know I was wrong, and that Fritz was as high-souled as a god in the matter; but then I sent him back his ring, and broke off with him and her too. I was a fiery young fool in those days," he added, with a sad and bitter smile, "a young fool."

"And was it never explained?"

"Never until to-day. He was far too proud a man to call me back."

"But the girl?" queried Helen, with increasing eagerness. "What did she do?"

"Oh, the girl," he repeated, turning away again and directing his gaze out of the window; "what would you expect her to do? She was only a peasant; and though I was honest enough then, I outgrew that fever centuries ago."

"Yes, you did," returned Helen, with gentle persistence, "but what did she do?"

"What do women usually do when they break with one lover? Get another, I suppose!"

The words were so hard and coarse to come from a man like Grant Herman that she involun-

tarily looked up quickly at him, and perhaps he noticed the action.

It was evident that some deep pain had provoked the expression, yet had found no relief in the rough words. The sculptor turned toward his companion as if to speak. Then slowly his eyes fell, and he said firmly, if a little stiffly:

"I believe I do her injustice. If she ever loved a man she was one who would love him always."

He left the little room without more words, his firm, even tread sounding down the uncarpeted stairs until the door of his own studio was heard to close after him. Mrs. Greyson stood before her clay wondering, and then, sinking into a chair, sat so long absorbed in thought that the short daylight faded about her and she was forced to give up further work that day. Replacing the wet cloth with which her bas-relief had been covered, she prepared to return home. As she passed the door of Herman's studio the sculptor opened it.

"I do not know," he said, extending his hand, "what made me so rude this afternoon. I am a bear of a fellow, but I had meant to treat you well."

He had fully recovered his composure, but his evident desire to efface the impression he had made naturally rendered it more lasting in Helen's mind.

VI.

A BOND OF AIR.

Troilus and Cressida; i.—3.

HAD Helen been present at the scene which took place in Herman's studio earlier in the afternoon, she would perhaps have wondered less at his disturbance.

In response to the sculptor's request made at the Club when Ninitta's name was first mentioned, Bently, when the girl finished posing for him, sent her to the sculptor's studio.

She came a day or two later than Bently had directed her, not hastening, although for six years she had shaped her entire life to the end of meeting Grant Herman. She came into the studio as calmly and as quietly as if it were some familiar place which she had left but yesterday, and she greeted the sculptor with as even and musical tone as in the old Roman days when as yet nothing had occurred to stir her peaceful bosom.

For his part the man stood and looked at her in silence. Even when a ghost from the past has appeared at his especial summons, one seldom sees it unmoved, and Herman was conscious that

his heart beat more quickly, that he breathed more heavily as Ninitta let fall behind her the rug *portière* and came towards him through the studio.

She had a dark, homely face, only redeemed from positive ugliness by her deep, expressive eyes. Her figure was superb; rather slender, lithe and sinewy, but without an angle or thin curve. Like Diana, she was long limbed, so that she seemed taller than she really was. The sweep of neck and shoulder was exquisite, and her simple dress was admirably adapted to display the lines of her supple form. As she walked down the studio, setting her feet firmly and carrying her head with fine poise, Grant Herman felt the ghost of an old passion stir in his heart.

"How do you do?" he composedly answered her greeting. "You have improved since I saw you last."

"Thank you," she said, in a rich voice with strong but pleasant accent. "I have had time."

"But improvement is not always a question of time," returned he. "Look at me."

"You have grown old," Ninitta commented, regarding him keenly. "You are gray now."

"Yes," retorted the other lightly, "I am an old man. "It is really a very long time since you posed for me in my little den at Rome."

"You remember those days perhaps, sometimes?" she said, dropping the long lashes over her eyes.

A shadow passed over Herman's high brow.

"Is one likely to forget such days?" he demanded. "Is one likely to forget how love may be turned to treachery and—"

"Pardon," the woman interrupted with dignity. "I did not come to be reproached, *eccelenza*. You have not forgotten Signor Hoffmeir?"

"No," he answered, with a deepening frown. "I have not forgotten the man who pretended to be my friend and proved it by stealing my betrothed."

"It is well that you have not forgotten," Ninitta went on calmly, but earnestly, "for I have a message from him. He charged me when he was dying," she added, crossing herself, "to give it to you with my own hands. I have been waiting for all these years, but now I am free of my promise."

Herman took the packet she extended toward him, and turned abruptly away. Ninitta seated herself in one of the tall easy chairs, removed her hat, and began a leisurely survey of the place. The sounds from the wharf outside, the cries of the sailors, the creaking of the cordage and the ships came softened and mellowed like the daylight into the wide, dim studio, giving a certain sense of remoteness by the contrast they suggested between the silence within and the stir of the world without. For all her outward calm, Ninitta's heart was beating hotly, and she longed with a

great yearning for a touch from the hand of the silent man before her; for a word of kindness from his lips. She watched him furtively, under cover of looking at a cast of Celini's Perseus upon a bracket above his head, as he stood reading the letter from Hoffmeir.

"Why did you not bring this to me before?" the sculptor asked at length, turning towards her. "It is six years now."

"Have I been able to shape my life?" returned Ninitta. "I have followed you to Florence, to Paris; you came to America. I followed you to New York; you were here. I have never ceased trying to reach you. It was not easy for me to cross half the world alone and without help; with no friends, no money; with nothing."

"But you have been in Boston a couple of months."

"Yes," she said quietly, looking up into his face. "But you knew it. I waited for you to send for me."

"I have only known it a week," was the sculptor's reply. "Do you know what was in Hoffmeir's letter?"

"His ring; the one you wore in Rome."

"But do you know what he wrote?"

"No," she answered. "How should I?"

Her questioner looked at her a moment in silence. She put up her head proudly with an involuntary response to the questioning which his

silence implied, and met his eyes unflinchingly. Yet he put his thought into words.

"It is seven years since I saw you," he said at length.

"It is seven years," she echoed.

"In seven years a great deal may happen," continued he, still regarding her closely.

"Much, much has happened," she returned, still meeting his gaze without shrinking.

"Are you married?" he asked, with a certain abruptness which to a careful observer might have indicated that the question cost him an effort.

"No," Ninitta returned simply; "how could I be when I was betrothed to you?"

"But that was broken off—"

The sentence stuck in his throat; and he wondered that he could have begun it. He wondered, too, how he could even have doubted the faith of the woman before him; and most of all he wondered if he had ever really loved her. He had an irritating consciousness that something was expected of him which he was unwilling to give; some sign of tenderness, some caress such as befitted the reconciliation of lovers long separated by misunderstanding and blinding jealousy. He felt as if he were falling below the demands of the occasion, most annoying of sensations to the masculine mind. But an important interview can with difficulty be changed from the key in which it is begun, and even had his feelings prompted a

display of tenderness, he felt that it would seem abrupt and forced. He waited for Ninitta to speak.

"Yes," she said, after a moment, as he did not continue, "it was broken off, but Signor Hoffmeir said that was because you did not understand, and that everything would be as it had been when you got his letter."

A sad hopelessness began to appear in her eyes; she had of old been too accustomed to submit to her lover's will to assume the initiative now, despite the development and strength which time had given to her character. The sculptor did not dream how her heart throbbed beneath her quiet demeanor, but he was too sensitive not to be touched by the unconscious appeal of her voice and look.

Seven years before, an enthusiastic student in Rome, he had loved or believed he loved, the peasant girl Ninitta, whom he had found in an excursion to Capri and induced to come to the Eternal City as a model.

Too honorable to betray her, he had meant to make the model his wife, and was betrothed to her with a solemnity of which he was keenly reminded to-day by the ring which she still wore upon her finger. Circumstances had convinced him, however, that Ninitta was deceiving him, and that she preferred the artist Hoffmeir, his best friend. To break off both engagement and friendship with

out listening to a word of explanation, to leave Rome and Italy, were comparatively easy for a passionate man stung to the quick by a double treachery. To forget was more difficult, and although a thousand times had Herman assured himself that he had extinguished the last spark of emotion concerning this episode, the faintest breath of an old memory was still sufficient to rekindle some seemingly dead ember. To-day, holding in his hand the letter from his lost friend which removed all his doubts, he saw that instead of being injured he had himself been cruel and unjust; he felt the full anguish of having committed an irreparable fault. We may outlive our past; its sorrows we may forget, its wrongs we may forgive, we may even smile at its crushed hopes, ambitions and loves with scarcely a tinge of bitterness; but that which we have been stings us ever with the burning pain of an undying remorse. It is not what we have done which awakens our deepest self-scorn; it is the fact that we were this which made it possible for us to do it. To feel that he had been capable of the cruelty of abandoning his betrothed and of wounding his closest friend, merely from a groundless suspicion, was to Grant Herman a pain never to be wholly outlived.

Nor was he without a teasing pain, through a less noble trait in his nature, from the consciousness that he had loved Ninitta. Once the fires of

love have burned out, any mortal is apt to be lost in amazed wonderment how they were ever kindled; and that it was hard for Grant Herman, at thirty-five, to understand how Grant Herman, at twenty-seven, could have adored an Italian peasant model is not so without precedent as to be wholly incomprehensible.

Ninitta had been a good girl, his thoughts ran, was doubtless so still; her figure was enchanting, he would have been no sculptor had he failed to appreciate that; he had been a boy, a foolish youngster to be dizzied by a rushing of the blood to his head; but to make her his wife now——

"Ninitta," he said, suddenly, breaking off from his thoughts into words, "I am not well to-day: come to-morrow. Are you comfortably settled in town? Do you need money?"

"No," she answered, rising, "I do not want money."

She went slowly down the studio without further word, only turning back as she passed Bently's picture for which she had posed, and which had been brought for the meeting of the Pagans.

"You have seen," she said, "I am able to earn. I have learned much while I was bringing you that letter. Across the world is a long way. No; I have no need of money."

VII.

IN WAY OF TASTE.

Troilus and Cressida ; iii.—3.

GRANT HERMAN'S studio, in which the Pagans met that night, was in its way no less unique than the company there gathered. It was a great, misshapen place, narrow, half a hundred feet long, and disproportionately high, with undressed brick walls and cement floor. The upper half of one of the end walls was taken up with large windows, before which were drawn dingy curtains. Here and there about the place were scattered modeling stands, water tanks mounted upon rude tripods, casts, and the usual lumber of a sculptor's studio ; while upon the walls were stuck pictures, sketches, and reproductions in all sorts of capricious groupings.

In one corner a flight of stairs led to a gallery high up against the wall, over the rude railing of which looked the heads of a couple of legless statues. From this gallery the stairs continued to ascend until a door near the roof was reached, leading to unknown regions well up in the building behind which the studio had been built as an afterthought. On shelves were confusedly disposed dusty bits of bronze, plaster, coarse pottery

and rare glass; things valueless and things beyond price standing in careless fellowship. A canvas of Corot looked down upon a grotesque, grimacing Japanese idol, a beautiful bronze reproduction of a vase by Michael Angelo stood shoulder to shoulder with a bean-pot full of tobacco; a crumpled cravat was thrown carelessly over the arm of a dancing faun, while a cluster of Baryé's matchless animals were apparently making their way with great difficulty through a collection of pipes, broken modeling tools, faded flowers and loose papers. Every where it was evident that the studio of Herman differed from heaven in at least its first law.

Quite in keeping with the picturesque, richly stored room, was the group of men walking about the place or seated near the rough table upon which refreshments were placed. On this table were a couple of splendid punch-bowls of antique cut glass, which, if not full now, had unmistakable marks of having been so earlier in the evening. A coarse dish of yellow earthen ware beside them held an ample supply of biscuits, and was in turn flanked by a couple of plates of cheese. Fruit, beer, and tobacco in various forms, with abundant glasses and pipes, completed the furnishing of the board, upon which a newspaper supplied the place of a cloth.

Tom Bently's long, shapely limbs were disposed in a big easy-chair by the table, his tongue

being just now employed in one of his not infrequent harangues upon art, his remarks being plentifully spiced with profanity.

"Whatever crazy ideas on art," Bently was saying, "aren't good for any thing else have to be put into a book. The surest recommendation in art circles is getting out a book or giving a rubbishy lecture. Every woman who has painted a few bunches of flowers or daubed a little pottery, writes a book to tell how she did it; as if it were the most astonishing thing in the world."

"Women are very like hens," interpolated Fenton; "they always cackle most over the smallest egg."

"If any one of the crew," continued Bently, "could appreciate a fiftieth part of the suggestions in a single sketch of an old master, she might have something to write about."

"But then she would know enough to keep still," said Rangely.

"Oh, a woman never knows enough to keep still," Bently retorted. "It is damned amusing to hear the average American——"

A chorus of protestations arose.

"We'll have nothing about the 'Average American,' Bently!"

"Start somebody else on his hobby," suggested Ainsworth; "that's the only way to choke Bently off. Where's Fenton? I never knew him quiet for so long in my life."

Arthur had been watching his companions and smoking in silence. He smiled brilliantly at Ainsworth's challenge.

"I'm overwhelmed by Bently's oaths," he said. "He outdoes himself to-night."

"When it comes time for Tom's epitaph," observed Rangely, "I shall suggest that it be a dash."

"Why do you swear so?" inquired Ainsworth. "Don't you think it in execrable taste?"

"Taste?" laughed Bently. "Yes; it's so far above all taste as to be a —— sight higher and bigger."

"I make a distinction," Herman put in good naturedly, "between swearing and blasphemy; and Tom never blasphemes. His cursing is all in the interest of the highest virtues."

"Profanity is like smoking," added Tom. "Every thing depends upon how you do it. The English, for instance, smoke for the brutality of the thing; they never have any of the French *finesse*, and their smoking is nothing less than a crime. But as the Arabs smoke it is one of the loftiest virtues; there's something godlike about it."

"It is from smoking," Fenton chimed in, "that the Orientals learned how to treat women; for a woman is like tobacco, the aroma should be enjoyed and the ashes thrown away."

"By George!" exclaimed one of the Pagans, moved by some rare compunction to remember

that he had a wife at home, "that's infamous, Arthur."

"It is my belief," observed Ainsworth deliberately, "that Fenton lies awake nights to invent beastly things to say about women, and when he gets something that he thinks is smart he throws it into the conversation any where, without the slightest regard to whether it fits or not."

"What makes you so bitter against women?" asked Bently.

"Yes," added Rangely, with mock deprecation. "Why do you want to annihilate the sex? What harm have women ever done to you?"

"Oh," retorted the artist, "it is on theoretical principles, purely. I adore that masculine ideal which man calls woman, but only finds in his brain. The highest on earth is reached only by the absolute elimination of the feminine. Ah! man is at his best in war," he went on, his attitude becoming less studied and more forcible, as he allowed his intellectual interest to overpower his vanity; "there he is all masculine; man without the limitations that the presence of woman imposes upon him. There woman is ignored, and even if she has been the cause of the war—and to be the cause of war is woman's noblest prerogative!—she is for the time being as completely forgotten as if she had never existed. She slips into oblivion as does the horn of grog which gives his courage."

Fenton was in a mood when he fancied he was talking well, a conviction which was not always an accurate measure of the real worth of his remarks. He delighted in presenting half truths in forcible phraseology, relishing the taste of an epigram quite without reference to its verity. He amused himself and his friends with talk more or less brilliant, of which no one knew better than himself the fallacy, but whose cleverness atoned with him for all defects. The intellectual excitement of giving free rein to his fancy and his tongue was dangerously pleasant to Arthur, who often more than half convinced himself of the verity of his extravagant theories, and oftener still involved himself in their defense by yielding to the mere whim of phrasing them effectively.

"You are on your high horse to-night, Fenton," cried Rangely, "you make no more of a metaphor than a racer of a hurdle."

"Don't stop him," Ainsworth said. "Let him run the course out now he's on the track."

"When man comes into his kingdom," Fenton broke out again, too fully aroused to mind the banter, yet with a sort of double consciousness enjoying the absurdity of the whole conversation, "when man comes into his kingdom, when we get to the perfection of the race, there will be no women. The ultimate man will be masculine —men, only men; gloriously and eternally masculine!"

"But how will the race perpetuate itself?" asked Tom in as matter of fact a tone as he might have inquired the time of day.

"Perpetuate itself!" blazed the other. "The race will not need to perpetuate itself. The world will be peopled with gods! When once women are gone the race will have become immortal!"

A shout of mingled applause and derision greeted this outburst, amid which Fenton threw himself back in a lounging chair and lighted a fresh cigar. He was intoxicated with himself, and few draughts are more dangerous.

"Take to the lecture platform, Fenton," jeered Ainsworth. "You'll make your mark in the world yet."

"I wonder you stopped at immortality," remarked Fred Rangely. "You usually go on to dispose of the future state."

"Impossible," retorted the artist, "for you never heard me say I believed in one."

"That's a fact," confessed the other, "but you insist so emphatically that women have no moral sense that your philosophy certainly would dispose of them if it allow any future state."

"For my part," declared Herman, "I've heard Fenton talk nonsense as long as I want to; let's look at the pictures."

An informal exhibition had been arranged, consisting of pictures loaned by friends, and in-

cluding several by members of the club. The most important of the latter was a gypsy which Bently had just completed, and which exhibited that artist's defects and excellences in the emphatic manner usual with his productions. The *motif* was better than the *technique*, but Bently's splendid feeling for color somehow carried him through, and made the picture not only striking but rich and suggestive.

"If you could learn to draw, Tom," Fenton said, as they stood looking at it, "you'd be the biggest man in America."

"Is that the new model you were talking about?" asked Rangely.

"Yes," Bently answered. "Isn't she a stunner?"

"I thought that shoulder was something new," put in Fenton. "The girl poses well; trust a woman with shoulders like that to know how to display them."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Grant Herman in sudden and rare irritation, "can you never have done slurring at women? Didn't you have a mother? In heaven's name let some woman escape your tongue for her sake!"

Such an outburst from their host produced a profound sensation upon the Pagans. The most tolerant of men, he was accustomed to listen to their wholesale denunciations of all things with a good natured smile, contenting himself with a

calm contradiction now and then. Proverbial for his patience and good temper, he produced the greater sensation now when he gave vent to his anger upon a subject which not only Fenton but every guest present usually considered fair game.

"I'm sorry I vexed you, Herman," Fenton said, turning to him after a moment's silence, "but however much I've abused women, you never heard me blackguard a woman in your life."

"You are right," the sculptor replied, catching the other's slender hand in his stalwart grasp. "I beg your pardon. I'm out of sorts, I suppose, or I shouldn't be quarreling like a Christian. Let's brew a new bowl and drink to Pagan harmony."

VIII.

THE INLY TOUCH OF LOVE.

Two Gentlemen of Verona ; ii.—7.

AFTER the Pagans had separated that night Fred Rangely lingered in Herman's studio.

The sculptor somehow found it possible to be more frank with Rangely than with any other of his companions, and although there was a difference of some half a dozen in the count of their years, and perhaps more in their ages as measured by experiences, Herman's strong but naturally stormy nature found much pleasure in the calm philosophy of his friend.

Scarcely were the two men alone, when Rangely turned to his host and demanded abruptly:

"Now, I want to know, Grant, what in the devil is the matter with you to-night? What set you out to pitch into Fenton so?"

Herman poured out a glass of wine and swallowed it before replying.

"Because I am a damned idiot!" he retorted savagely. "I'm all shaken up, Fred; and the worst of it is that I don't see any way out of the snare I'm in."

"It isn't real trouble, I hope."

"Isn't it! By Jove!" cried the sculptor, "the more honest a man is in this world the worse off he is. If I hadn't had a conscience when I was a young fellow, I should be all right now. Who is it—Fenton?—that is always saying that he asks forgiveness for his virtues and thanks the gods for every vice he can cultivate?"

"Well," Rangely remarked, filling a pipe, and curiously surveying his companion, who was raging up and down the studio, "you don't seem to be in an especially cheerful and enlivening frame of mind; that's a fact. If a fellow can be of any help, call on; if not, at least try to take it a little more gently for the sake of your friends."

"Do any thing?" retorted the other. "No; there's nothing to be done. I'm a fool."

"Even that disease has been remedied before now," Rangely said coolly; "though usually experience and time are necessary to the cure."

"I'll tell you the whole story," Herman exclaimed, flinging himself into a chair. "It is all simple enough. It is always simple enough to tangle things up so that Lucifer himself cannot unsnarl them. When I was in Rome I was in love—crazily, gushingly in love, you understand, like a big schoolboy—with a girl I found in Capri. She was a good little thing, with a figure like Helen's; that's what did the business for me. I coaxed her to Rome to be my model, and then that infernal conscience of mine made me ask her

to marry me. I could have done any thing I liked with her; I knew that; she had nobody to look after her but a half sister who paid about as much attention to her as if she had been a grasshopper. But the infernal New England Puritanism in my blood wouldn't let me hurt her."

"And somebody else wasn't so scrupulous?" asked the listener as his friend paused in his story.

"You think so?" returned Herman eagerly. "Then I wasn't so unutterably a scoundrel for thinking so, too, was I? I did doubt her; I had reason to. She posed for a friend of mine, a painter; you know, of course—Hang it! What's the use of going into all the details. I was poor as a church mouse or she shouldn't have done it at all, even for him. The gist of the story is that I was jealous and flew out at both of them, and left Rome in a rage!"

The two men sat in silence for some moments. Rangely puffed vigorously at his pipe, while his companion stared savagely into the shadows in the further end of the studio. Neither looked at the other; the hearer appreciated too well the shamefacedness by which these unusual confidences must be accompanied. From some distant steeple a clock was faintly heard striking two.

"And to-day," Herman at length began again in an altered voice, "to-day she came here. She has followed me all these years, going through heaven knows what experiences and hardships, to

bring me the proof that I was a madman blinded by groundless jealousy, and that instead of being wronged I cursedly abused both her and poor dead old Hoffmeir."

Again there came an interval of silence. A lamp flickered and went out with a muffled sound. The thoughts of both men were of that formless character scarcely to be distinguished from emotions; on the one hand sad and remorseful, on the other sympathetic and pitiful.

"Well?" Rangely ventured after a time.

"But what shall I do?" demanded Herman. "I cannot marry her."

"No, of course not. She cannot expect it after banging about the world."

"Oh, it isn't that," the other said hastily. "She is as good and as pure as when I left her; at least I believe so. And she does expect it."

"She does expect it!" echoed his friend. "Ah!"

The reception of a confidence is a most delicate ordeal through which few people come unscathed. Rare individuals are born with the ready sympathies, quick apprehension, and exquisite tact needful; but the vast majority are sure to wound their friends if the latter ever venture to approach with their armor of reticence laid wholly aside.

Although perhaps not the ideal confidant, Rangely was sympathetic and possessed of at least sufficient discretion to avoid comment until he knew the whole situation and was sure that his

opinion was desired. He was still unable fully to understand his friend's agitation, the task of disposing of an old sweetheart in so inferior a position not appearing to his easy-going nature a matter sufficiently difficult to warrant so deep disquiet.

Precisely the clew that he needed the sculptor had not given, but he was endeavoring to overcome his repugnance to disclosing his most secret feelings. Every word cost him an effort, but he went on with a savage sense of doing penance by the self-inflicted torture.

"Yes," he repeated, "she expects it. Why shouldn't she, poor thing? She has not changed, and she does not understand that I may have altered."

"And you have?"

Grant Herman looked up and down the great studio, now growing dusky from the burning out of candles here and there. An antique lamp which was lighted only on special occasions stood where the breeze came to it from the high window, and the flame, wind-swept, smoked and flared. Through the silence the listener's ear could detect a faint sound of the tide washing against the piles of the wharf outside.

The sculptor started up suddenly and stood firmly, throwing back his splendid head and shoulders, and looking straight into the eyes of his friend.

"Yes," he said in a clear, low voice. "I have changed. I— There is some one else."

"Life," remarked Rangely, with seeming irrelevancy, "life is a fallacy."

"I'd like to be honorable," Herman continued, "but how can I? It is impossible to be honest to both her and myself. If I hadn't had any scruples, then— Bah! What a beast I am! Poor Ninitta."

Still Rangely smoked in silence, and the sculptor went on again.

"It has always been my creed that when a man has allowed a woman to love him—much more, made her love him, as I did—he is a black-hearted knave to let a change in himself wreck her happiness. Now I am put to the test."

"And the other one?" asked Rangely. "Does she know that you care for her?"

"I have never said so to her. Heaven only knows how much she feels by intuition. A man always fancies that the woman he loves can tell."

"That may depend something on how often you see her."

"I see her nearly every day. She is my pupil."

"Mrs. Greyson?"

"Yes," Herman said, a little defiantly, as if now the secret was told he challenged the right of another man to share it.

"Is she a widow?"

"Yes," the other answered, with no perceptible

pause, and yet between the question and his reply had come to him the swift remembrance that he really knew nothing of his pupil's life or history, and had simply taken it for granted that her husband was not living. "Arthur Fenton brought her here," he added, rather thinking aloud than answering any point of Rangely's query. "He was an old friend of her husband."

"But what will you do with the other?"

Instead of replying Herman got up from the seat into which he had flung himself, and went about the studio putting out the lights.

"Go home," he said with a whimsical smile. "I'm sure I don't know what we are talking about at this time of the morning. As for what I shall do— Well, time will show; I am as ignorant as yourself on the subject."

IX.

VOLUBLE AND SHARP DISCOURSE.

Comedy of Errors ; ii.—1.

IT suited Fenton's whim next morning to dine with Mrs. Greyson. He had established the habit of dropping in when he chose, always sure of a welcome, and always sure, too, of a listener to the tirades in which he was fond of indulging. If Helen did not always accord him agreement, she at least gave attention, and he cared rather to talk than to convince.

His æsthetic taste, moreover, was gratified by the pretty breakfast table ; and he was not without a subtle sense of pleasure in the beauty and harmonious dress of his hostess, who possessed the rare charm of contriving to be always well attired. This morning she wore a gown of russet cashmere with here and there knots of dull gold ribbon, which tint formed a pleasing link between the stuff and the color of her clear skin.

"It is good of you to come," she said, as she poured his coffee. "There are so few days left before you will have married a wife and cannot come. I shall miss you very much."

"Why do you persist in talking in that way?"

Fenton returned. "I'm not going out of the country or out of the world. You could not take a more absolute farewell if I were about to be cremated."

"You do not know," replied she, smiling. "However, I am glad you are to be married. It will do you good. You need a wife, if you do dread matrimony so much."

"It is abominable," he observed deliberately, "to talk as I do. Of course I do not mind what you choose to think of me; or rather I am sure you will not misunderstand."

"I do not," Mrs. Greyson interpolated significantly.

"But it seems a reflection upon Miss Caldwell," he continued, answering her interruption only by a grimace, "for me to discourse of marriage just as I do. It isn't because I'm not fond of her. It is my protest against the absurd and false way in which society regards marriage; in a word against marriage itself."

Mrs. Greyson understood Arthur Fenton as well as any woman can understand a man who is her friend. Her friendship softened the harshness of her judgments, but she could not be blind to his vanity, his constant efforts at self-deception, and so far as she was in possession of the facts, she reasoned correctly in regard to his approaching marriage.

"No," she said calmly, "it isn't even that.

You talk partly for the sake of saying things that sound effective, and partly because you are morbid from over introspection. If you were vicious, I should say you did it as an atonement. Many people would not understand you, but as I do, it is harmless for you to talk to me."

"Introspective? Of course. Can any body help being that in this age? And as for being morbid—it all depends upon definitions. I try to be honest with myself."

"The subtlest form of hypocrisy," she answered, "often consists in what we call being honest with ourselves. I gave that up long ago. You are not honest with yourself about this marriage. If you don't wish to marry Miss Caldwell, who forces you to do so?"

"Forces me to? Good heavens! I do wish to marry her. Of course I don't ever expect to be perfectly happy. In this inexplicable world natures that demand that every thing shall be explained must necessarily remain unsatisfied. Still, I'd take a little more coffee as a palliation of my lot, if you please."

"It is well you are to marry," observed Helen, refilling his cup. "You've concentrated your attention upon yourself too long."

"But I am afraid of poverty. If I find some old Boston duffer with a lot of money, and can fool him into admiring the frame of one of my pictures, he may buy it, and I can pay the butcher,

the baker and the gas man for a week. If I can't, I must daub the canvas a little higher and try the same game in New York, and— "

"Rubbish!" she interrupted. "The difficulty is, you are too self-indulgent. You are too much afraid of the little discomforts."

"No," he answered; "men—at least sensitive men—do not suffer so much from the discomforts of poverty as from its indignities."

"If—" began Helen; but without finishing, she rose from the table, went to the window and stood looking out.

Fenton watched her idly, knowing perfectly that the woman before him was capable of sacrificing for him all the little income which was her's; and he wondered, as men will, how deep her feeling for him had really become, and whether it had ever passed that mysterious and undefinable line which separates love from friendship.

Helen had often endeavored to assist the artist out of some financial difficulty by buying one of his unsaleable pictures, a pretext which he had the grace to put aside by refusing to sell, sometimes sending her as a gift precisely the work for which he could most easily find a purchaser. There was continually a silent struggle, more or less consciously carried on between the two, although seldom appearing upon the surface. Too much Fenton's friend not to be pained by his weaknesses, Helen was stung to the quick by a certain in-

sincerity which she often detected alike beneath his raillery and his cynicism. Too noble to yield to any belief in a friend's unworthiness without resistance, she suffered anew whenever his words seemed to ring false, and now there were tears in her eyes as she looked out into the sunny street. She pressed them firmly back, however, and turned a calm face towards her guest, who sat playing with his spoon and watching her with a half troubled, half amused expression.

"I've composed my epitaph," he said irrelevantly. "Will you please compose my monument."

"Oh, willingly. But it will be necessary to know the epitaph, so that the monument may express the same sentiment."

"I shall have no name," Arthur returned. "Only—

L'homme est mort. Soit.

"How does that strike you?"

"Ah," she cried impulsively, "how does any thing strike me? You play at being wretched as sentimental school girls do, when in their case it is slate pencils and pickled limes and in your case it is vanity. If you were half as miserable as you pretend, you'd have blown your brains out long ago, or deemed yourself the veriest craven alive. I've no patience with such attitudinizing."

"You are partly right," he admitted, "but do any of us find the savor of life so sweet as to make it worth while?"

Something in his voice, a ring of what might be pity in his tone, humiliated Helen. She suspected that he thought her outburst arose from a too great fondness for himself, for grief at parting and at giving him up to another. She struggled to regain her calmness; she felt the impossibility of contradicting the belief which she was sure existed in his mind; she was conscious that to say, "I do not love you," would appear to him proof incontrovertible that the reverse was true. Her throat contracted painfully and she cast down her eyes lest the tears in them should be seen.

"The Caffres," Fenton continued, after an instant's pause, "are said to be so fond of sugar that they will eat a handful of sand rather than lose a grain or two that has fallen to the ground; it seems to me life is the sand and joy in the proportion of the sugar. I'm not willing to take the sand, and I protest against it. There is no morality in it."

"There is no morality in any thing but death," Helen returned drearily.

"Death!" echoed Fenton. "Do you call that moral! Death that crushes the emotions, that kills the passions, that pollutes the flesh; the monster which debauches all that is sacred in the physical, that degrades to the level of the lowest all that is high in the intellectual—is this your idea of the moral? The coarsest rioting of sen-

sual life is sacred beside it. Death moral? *Mon Dieu*, Helen, how you do abuse terms!"

Fenton was continually treading upon the dangerous edge between pathos and bathos, between impressiveness and absurdity. Had he not possessed extremely sensitive perceptions which enabled him to judge swiftly and exactly of the effect of his declamations, and the keenest sense of the ludicrous that helped him to turn into ridicule whatever could not be made to pass for earnest, much of his extravagant talk would have excited amusement and, not impossibly, contempt, instead of producing the half serious effect he desired. He could impart a vast air of sincerity to his speech, moreover, and could even for the moment be sincere. In the present case his earnest and real feeling saved this outburst from the somewhat theatrical air which the words might easily have had if spoken at all artificially.

"The history of mankind," went on the artist, in a sort of two-fold consciousness, deeply feeling on the one hand what he was saying, but on the other endeavoring to direct the conversation to generalities in which would be lost the dangerous personal remarks which threatened, "the whole history of mankind is a protest against death as an insult, an outrage. All religions are only mankind's defiance of death more or less largely phrased."

"No," Helen said. "Not our defiance; our

confession of a craven fear. I am afraid of death. I don't dare take my life."

"We are talking," responded her companion, in his turn leaving the table and approaching the window, "like a couple of unmitigated ghouls. I acknowledge your right to put aside your life if it bores you; man has at least that one inalienable right. But why should you? Art is left still."

"Art," she repeated with profound sadness; "yes, but a woman is never content with abstractions. She demands something more definite. And, by the way, Will came to see me yesterday."

"Yes! What did he want?"

"He said he only came to see how I was. I think he recognizes that now he has come from Europe our secret is sure to leak out soon, and is looking the ground over to see how it is best to behave. He was very entertaining; I never enjoyed him more thoroughly."

"He's a model husband," Fenton observed thoughtfully. "As well as you like each other, I'll be hanged if I can see why you don't live like other people."

"It is precisely because we don't live like other people," was the reply, "that we do like each other so well. We are the best of friends; we were the worst possible husband and wife. I hated him officially, and— There! Why must you bring all that up again? Let the dead past bury its dead."

"But the past won't bury its dead. It sits over

their corpses like a persistent resurrectionist, in a fashion which is irresistibly disheartening. Did it never strike you, by the way, what a droll caricature might be made on that line? Time as a decrepit old sexton, you know."

"So few people can joke on those subjects that it would appeal to a very limited audience, I'm afraid."

"Oh, that's true of every thing that is good for any thing."

"Unfortunately the converse is not true, for every thing appealing to a small audience is by no means good."

"Not even marriage?"

"Still harping on matrimony," said Helen, laughing. "What will you do after the knot is really tied? You speak in the mournful tone of one who reads '*Lasciate ogni speranza*' upon his wedding horseshoe."

"Oh, not quite," he laughed back, "for after marriage a man can always amuse himself, you know, by looking at any woman he may meet and fancying how much worse off he might be if he had married her instead of his wife."

"Well," Helen remarked, turning, "your conversation is amusing and doubtless deeply instructive, but I must go to the studio. My bas-relief will hardly complete itself, I suppose, and I've a splendid offer for it, to decorate a house in Milton. It is to be paneled into the side of an oak stairway at the back of the main hall. Isn't that fine?"

X.

O, WICKED WIT AND GIFT.

Hamlet; i.—5.

ANOMALIES are doubtless as truly the product of law as results whose logic is evident, and the strange relations between Mrs. Greyson and her husband were therefore to be considered the outcome of fixed causes from which no other result was possible.

Married when scarcely more than a girl, shy, undeveloped and ignorant of the world, Helen came from a secluded life, which had been pretty equally divided between the library of her dead father and the woods surrounding the country village where she lived. She had never even fancied that she loved Dr. Ashton; but she had married him as she would have obeyed any other command of the stern aunt who had presided severely over her orphaned childhood. He, half-a-dozen years her senior, had been enamored of her wonderful beauty and modest intellectuality; and, being accustomed always to gratify the impulse of the moment, he had married her with a precipitancy as characteristic as it was reckless.

It was owing to a certain mutual scorn of con-

ventionalities that Helen and her husband at length decided to separate. Without the aid of the law and without scandal, they settled back into single liberty, the wife taking again her father's name. They had spent their married life abroad, where Dr. Ashton had remained until a short time previous to the opening of our story, and as neither husband nor wife had been in their single life known in Boston, and as Helen was chary of new acquaintances, their relations had thus far remained undiscovered. Helen, at least, recognized how improbable it was that this secrecy would long remain inviolate, but she went quietly on her way, letting events take their own course.

Arthur Fenton was an old friend of her husband whom Helen had met in Europe, but had known intimately only during her Boston life. She had found him sympathetic, responsive and entertaining, and as any lonely woman clings to the companionship of an appreciative man, she had clung to the friendship and comradeship of the artist.

Going across the Common towards the studio on this sunny morning, when the air was brisk and bracing, the naked trees clearly and delicately defined against the sky, Helen's thoughts went back to her past; to her shy, secluded girlhood, to the years of her married life, and to the way in which she had been living since she and her husband parted. She reflected with a smile, half pity, half

contempt, of the proud, reticent girl who had pored over books and drawings in the musty, deserted library at home, almost wondering if she were the same being. She looked from the Joy Street mall across the hollow which holds the Frog Pond, the most charming view on the Common, yet not even the golden sparkle of the water or the beautiful line of the slope beyond could chase from her mind the picture of the high, dim old room, lined to the ceiling with book-shelves, dingy and dusty from neglect. She seemed to hear still the weird tapping of the beech-tree boughs against the tall narrow windows, and still to smell odor of old leather; she remembered vividly the dull dizziness that came from stooping too long over some volume too heavy to hold, above which, half lying upon the carpetless floor, she had bent with drooping golden curls. She remembered, too, the remoteness of the real world from the ideal sphere in which her fancy placed her; how unimportant and unsubstantial to her had appeared the events of daily life as compared with the incidents of the world the old books in the musty library opened to her. The life of these magic tomes was the real, and that humdrum state through which her visible pathway lay was the dream. To the imaginative girl, half child, half poet, her marriage had prospectively seemed merely an accident of the trivial outside existence which surrounded without penetrating her true being; and the sharpness

of the rude awakening from this childish misconception still pierced the woman's proud soul.

No woman recalls her childhood without regret, and despite the philosophy she had cultivated, Helen felt a deep sadness as the old days, somber and dull though they had been, rose before her. She hurried her step a little as if to escape her past, when a pleasant voice at her elbow said:

"Good morning, Helen. Upon what wickedness are you bent now. You go too fast to be on a good errand."

"Good morning, Will," she answered, without turning, for the voice brought the speaker before her mental vision as plainly as her eyes could have done. "I was just thinking of you, and of the days when you found me at home."

"Yes." responded Dr. Ashton, "what were you thinking of them?"

"Nothing very pleasant," she answered with a sigh. "What a gorgeous day it is. Arthur has been breakfasting with me."

"Arthur is going to be married," remarked her companion good humoredly. "I've just been out to buy him a wedding present."

"What is it?"

"Oh, something he chose himself. It is not safe to tell you, though."

"Haven't I proved my discretion?" Helen said

lightly. "I thought that by this time you'd be willing to trust me with your most deadly secrets."

"This is a deadly secret, indeed," he returned, taking from his pocket a small morocco case.

"Oh, jewelry," Helen said, with an accent of disappointment. "I should never have suspected you of such commonplaceness, Will."

"Not jewelry; a jewel," retorted Dr. Ashton, opening the case and displaying a tiny vial.

"Will!" Helen exclaimed, stopping suddenly and catching her husband by the arm, "you won't give him that?"

"Why not? I promised him long ago that I'd get it for him, and he particularly asked for it as a wedding-gift."

"Oh, Will; don't do it! He'll use it sometime when he's blue; he'll ——"

"Nonsense," responded the physician, restoring the case to his pocket. "I've diagnosed his case perfectly. He isn't very robust, he's infernally sensitive, and he's no end morbid. He fancies he may want to kill himself, and I dare say he will have leanings that way. Most of us do. He has wanted to a good many times before now, and he is likely to again, but he won't do it. He's too soft-hearted. He might get up steam enough as far as courage goes, but he'd never forget other people and their opinion. He couldn't bear to hurt others, and still less could he bear the idea

of their blaming him. He is precisely the man who cannot take his own life."

"But what puts it into his head just now? Why should he marry if he dreads it so?"

"It is all of a piece with his morbidness. He is really in love with Miss Caldwell, I think, but he has brooded over the matter as he broods over every thing, and seeing the uncertain nature of matrimony, he like a wise man provides for contingencies. There may be something behind that I don't know of, but I think not. He'll feel easier if he has this, and I am honestly doing him a favor, if it isn't in the way he thinks."

"I do not know," persisted Helen, "but I do wish you wouldn't do it. How would his bride feel if she knew?"

"I don't know her," Dr. Ashton returned coolly, "so of course I can't tell how sensible she is; but in any case I can trust Arthur's discretion."

"She's orthodox," said Helen, "or, no, I think she is not so bad as that; but she would regard the idea of suicide as unspeakably wicked. At least I think so; I never saw her but once. Oh, I do hate to have Arthur marry her. It's dreadful!"

"Of course; it's dreadful to think of any man's marrying, for that matter," he returned with a smile, "but he is a man who was sure to do it sooner or later."

"He's a man of so much principle," Helen mused, half aloud.

"Principle," sneered her companion laughingly, "principle is only formulated policy."

"I am dreadfully tired of epigrams," sighed Helen as they walked down West street. "Whether Arthur learned the habit of you or you of him I don't know; but the pair of you are enough to corrupt all Boston. I do wish you'd give me that case. I'm sure I need it far more than Arthur does. He's going to be married, his pictures are praised and are beginning to sell, he has life before him and every thing to live for, while I have nothing."

"Life is before you, too," answered her husband gravely, putting his hand upon her arm to prevent her flying under the wheels of a carriage which in her absorption she had not noticed. "Look here, Helen; it wouldn't be any better if Arthur wanted to marry you. You are too melancholy alone without having him to push you deeper into the slough of despond."

"You are mistaken, Will," was the quiet response. "I am fond of Arthur, very fond, indeed; but not in that way. I am a fool to grieve about his marriage; I own that, though after all I've lived through I ought to be too hardened to care. But you must acknowledge that it isn't very pleasant for me to see him deliberately going away to marry a woman who would consider me a Bohemian, and very likely any thing but respectable, because you and I choose to be comfortable

apart instead of miserable together. If I were not so utterly alone in the world, losing a friend would not be so great a matter, perhaps; but he is all I have now, Will."

"It is hard, old lady; that's a fact. I wish I could straighten things out for you, but I don't see how I can."

"No," Helen said drearily, "nobody can."

XI.

WHOM THE FATES HAVE MARKED.

Comedy of Errors; i.—1.

UPON entering the small studio where her bas-relief stood, Helen found Herman there before her. He had removed the wet cloths from the clay and was examining the work with close attention.

"You need a model for this figure," he said, indicating the month of May. "You must take that turn of the shoulder from nothing but life."

Helen came and stood beside him, looking at the work. The instinct of the artist for the moment superseded all other feelings in her mind, and she forgot alike her own troubles and the ill-omened gift with which her husband purposed remembering the nuptials of her friend.

The figure of May of which Herman spoke was that of a beautiful young girl casting backward a wistful look at the fallen flowers which she had dropped but might not stay to gather up again. The splendid movement of the youthful figure, thrown forward in her running, but with one shoulder turned toward the spectator, so that the upper portion of the beautiful bosom was seen,

formed one of the finest details of the composition.

"Yes," the sculptor said again, "you must have a model for that, and I have one coming this morning. To be honest, I came up here hoping you'd need her. I believe she is a good girl, and I do not like the idea of her being about among the studios."

He went on to speak of the figure, adding suggestions of treatment, feeling and posing; and as he talked he was conscious of needlessly prolonging the conversation for the mere pleasure of being near this woman, and of secretly cherishing some vague feeling that not only would Ninitta be safe under Mrs. Greyson's guardianship, but that some solution of the complexities in which he found himself involved would result from bringing together the two women so closely connected with his life.

He went away into his own studio at length, but Helen had scarcely got fairly to work before he reappeared with Ninitta.

Ninitta was much the same in outward appearance as upon the previous day, but between this morning's mental state and that of yesterday there was a great gulf. The Italian's character was a strange if not wholly unique mixture of simplicity and worldly wisdom. All her experiences, her life as a model in various parts of the world, her hardships and successes, while teach-

ing her only too sharply the follies and vices of mankind, had never for an instant shaken her faith in Grant Herman. He was her god. It is even doubtful if any thing he could have done would have destroyed her belief in his integrity and nobility of soul. When he left her, she acquiesced, it is true, but with a wild passion of anguish. She knew he misjudged, but she chose to phrase it to herself that he was deceived; his rashness and hot-headedness were to her only so many fresh evidences of his greatness of character. She was not the first woman who has vaguely felt that unreasoning jealousy and passion are admirable or even essential attributes of virility, and who has worshiped a man as much for his faults as for his virtues.

To the dream of meeting Herman with the proofs that he had been deceived, Ninitta had clung unyieldingly through the dreary years since the death of Hoffmeir, who had been kind to her for the sake of his shattered friendship with Herman, and for the sake, too, of his own hopeless love for herself. It was from mingled shyness and pride that Ninitta had waited for a summons from the sculptor after she had reached Boston; but when she had at last gone to his studio it was with keen emotion. She had not considered that both herself and her old-time lover had changed in the seven years of separation. She had not reflected that believing her false he could not but have en-

deavored to forget her. She could not know that contact with the world, if it had not made him ashamed of his youthful enthusiasm, had at least showed him how the marriage he had contemplated would have appeared in the eyes of worldly wisdom, and had so educated him that reason was less helpless before passion than of old.

But to-day Ninitta was a different woman, changed by the agony of a night into which had been compressed the bitterness of years. She had been too sharply wounded at being greeted by a hand-shake in place of the too well remembered kisses, with commonplace kind inquiries instead of an embrace, not to realize at least how entirely the relations between herself and Herman were changed. She did not understand the alteration, it is true. To do that would have required not only a knowledge of facts of which she could have no cognizance, but far keener powers of reason than were centered in Ninitta's shapely head. Only of one thing she was sure; there the instinct of her sex stood her in good stead. She was convinced that some other woman had won the sculptor's love from her. When she came into Helen's studio this morning she watched sharply for some token which should show her the relations in which the two artists stood to each other; but she could detect nothing significant. Mrs. Greyson was intent only upon her work, and whatever the sculptor

may have felt at the meeting of Helen and Ninitta, he made no outward sign.

The model showed a quickness of comprehension in taking the pose required, and the shoulder she bared was of so exquisite mold that Helen's keenest artistic powers were aroused. Ninitta understood the art of posing as a painter knows the use of brush and colors; she had for it an inborn capacity impossible except in the child of an art land. Moved by the inspiration of that most beautiful bust, Mrs. Greyson worked enthusiastically, scarcely noticing when her master left the room, an indication of indifference which the model did not fail to note.

XII.

WHAT TIME SHE CHANTED.

Hamlet; iv.—7.

IT was February, and the night but one before the day fixed for Arthur Fenton's marriage. He was spending the evening with Mrs. Greyson, and it chanced that Grant Herman and Fred Rangely were also there. The sculptor went seldom to the house of his pupil, and when he did visit her, he satisfied some fine, secret delicacy by taking always a friend with him. Helen was sufficiently Bohemian or sufficiently unworldly to care little if people criticised her way of living. She had inherited a small property which made her comfortable and independent; and she declined being hampered by a chaperon.

"My art is my chaperon," she wrote to an elderly relative who wished to come to Boston and matronize her. "A woman who is daring enough to be an artist is regarded as bold enough to take care of herself, I suppose. At least nobody troubles me, and I ask nothing more."

On the present occasion Arthur Fenton asked leave to light his cigar, and although Herman felt this something of a profanation, it was not long

before he and Rangely added their wreaths to the smoke garlands which hung upon the air, and had not the hostess become somewhat accustomed to tobacco in foreign *ateliers*, it is to be doubted if she could have complacently endured the fumes which arose.

All subjects of heaven and earth came drifting into the talk, and at length something evoked from Rangely his opinion of Emerson.

"Emerson was great," he said, "Emerson often recalled Goethe in Goethe's cooler and more intellectual moods; but Emerson lacked the loftiness of vice; he was eternally narrow."

"'The loftiness of vice,'" echoed the hostess. "What does that mean? It sounds vicious enough."

"Emerson," Rangely returned, "knew only half of life. He never had any conception of the passionate longing for vice *per se;* the thrill, the glow which comes to some men at the splendid caress of sin in her most horrible shape. Do you see what I mean? He couldn't imagine the ecstasy that may lie in mere foulness."

"No," replied Helen, "I'm afraid I don't quite see. Though I am sure I ought to be shocked. Do you mean that he should have been vicious?"

"Certainly not; but it was his limitation not to be tempted; not to be able to project himself into a personality which riots in wickedness far more intensely than a saint follows righteousness."

"If you mean that he could not have been wicked if he tried, that, I own, was in a sense a limitation."

"Yes; and a fatal one. No man can be wholly great who understands only one half of human impulses."

"But what do you mean by wickedness?" demanded Herman, a little combatively.

"Oh," laughed Rangely, "I'm not to be entrapped into giving metaphysical and theological definitions. I mean what we are expected to call wickedness, conventionally speaking. I've an old cad of a parson in my new play and I am trying to decide if it will do to have him advocate a grand scheme for reforming the world by reversing definitions and calling those things men choose to do virtues, and dubbing whatever man detests, vices."

"That is rather more clever than orthodox," Helen laughed. "How is your play getting on, Mr. Rangely?"

"Oh, fairish, thank you. The trouble is that the drama went out of fashion long ago. First they replaced it by dresses and scenery, but now every thing has given way to souvenir programmes; so I've got to write up to a souvenir or I sha'n't make any thing out of the play."

"I hoped you were above such mercenary considerations."

"I am trying to make myself so," he retorted. "I think about three successful plays would be

tonic enough to bring my conscience up to proper art levels."

Herman had taken little part in this colloquy, smoking in silence, and regarding his companions. Fenton had thus far been even more quiet, scarcely contributing a word to the conversation; and the sculptor's thoughts turned upon the handsome young fellow, sitting in one of his favorite twisted attitudes in a German chair, his beardless face paler than usual, though a red spot glowed in either cheek, and his dilated pupils betrayed his excitement. He was smoking steadily, but with little apparent knowledge of either his cigar or his surroundings.

"Upon my word," mused Herman. "A cheerful looking man for a bridegroom he is. If he were going to the scaffold he could hardly seem more melancholy. What in the world is the matter with him? I wonder if he has been dragged into a marriage he doesn't like. How Mrs. Greyson watches him."

Helen was indeed watching Fenton closely, although to a less keen observer than Herman her surveillance would hardly have been apparent. She, too, was thinking of Fenton's downcast air, and knowing him more intimately than did the sculptor, she reasoned less doubtfully, although perhaps not more accurately than the latter concerning what was passing in the mind of her silent friend.

"He surely loves Miss Caldwell," she thought, "but he is so foolish. He is thinking now that he will never meet these comrades again as an unhampered man. He feels just now all he is giving up. I should like him better to remember what he is gaining. Are all men inherently selfish, I wonder. It is well for Miss Caldwell's peace of mind that she cannot see him now. Perhaps when he is with her he sees only the other side; I am sure I hope so."

She turned away with a sigh, and saw Herman looking at her. Their eyes met in one of those brief glances of intelligence which serve as fine fibers to knit people together.

The conversation soon turned upon the opinion a certain critic had expressed concerning a picture then on exhibition.

"Bah!" cried Fenton suddenly; "what does he know about art?—he is bow-legged!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Rangely, "have you waked up? I thought we were safe from you for the whole evening."

"It is never safe to count on his silence," Herman said. "He has probably been meditating some stinging epigram against woman. We shall have something wild directly."

"No; I've nothing to say against women now," Arthur returned, rising, "for I want Mrs. Greyson to sing. I wish you'd stop poisoning the air with those confounded cigarettes, Fred. The use of

cigarettes degrades smoking to the level of the small vices, and I object to it on principle."

He opened the piano as he spoke, and without demur Helen allowed him to lead her to the instrument.

"If you do not mind," she said a little diffidently, turning to her guests after she had seated herself, "I should like to have the gas lowered a trifle. It may seem a little sentimental, but I do not like to be looked at too keenly when I sing."

The flames of the gas jets were dimmed, and Helen struck a few soft chords. Herman listened intently. He had heard Fenton praise Mrs. Greyson's singing, but he was entirely unprepared for what was to come, and he never forgot the thrill of that experience.

An unpretending, flowing prelude; then suddenly the tones of the singer.

Helen's voice was a rich, fibrous mezzo-soprano; and the music she sang, half chant, half melody, was evidently an improvisation. The words were the exquisite song which opens Shelley's *Hellas:*

I strew these opiate flowers
  On thy restless pillow,—
They were plucked from Orient bowers,
  By the Indian billow.
    Be thy sleep
    Calm and deep,
Like theirs who fell; not ours who weep.

Away, unlovely dreams!
  Away, false shapes of sleep!

Be his, as Heaven seems,
  Clear and bright and deep !
Soft as love and calm as death,
Sweet as summer night without a breath.

Sleep ! sleep ! My song is laden
  With the soul of slumber ;
It was sung by a Samian maiden
  Whose lover was of the number
      Who now keep
      That calm sleep
Whence none may wake ; where none shall weep.

I touch thy temples pale !
  I breathe my soul on thee !
And could my prayers avail,
  All my joy should be
Dead, and I would live to weep,
So thou might'st win one hour of quiet sleep !

It is difficult to convey the effect of this song upon its hearers. The strangeness, the unconventionality of the recitative, the wonderful, sad beauty of the poem, the dim light through which Helen's vibrating, passionate voice thrilled, all helped to impress the hearers. There was a personal quality about the chant which made it seem like a direct appeal from the singer to the heart of each listener. It came to each as a spontaneous outflowing of the singer's innermost self ; a confidence made in mystic wise, sacred and inviolable, and setting him honored by receiving it forever from the common multitude of men. It was an appeal to some unspoken and unspeakable

bond of fealty, which made the pulses throb and great emotions stir in the breast. Before hearing one would be stubbornly incredulous of the possibility of his being so deeply affected; afterward he would remember how he had been moved with wonder and longing.

Especially was Grant Herman much moved. Thoughts came into his mind of the old minstrels chanting to their harps; he seemed to hear Sappho singing again in the gardens of Mytilene; this was the woman he loved, and he felt himself as never before surrounded palpably by her presence. The improvisation was a part of herself as no other music could have been; and in some subtle, sensuous way, the lover seemed for the moment to be one with his beloved. His eyes filled with tears in a sort of ecstasy, and he shrank back into the shadow lest some of his friends should detect the glad, salt drops which no eyes but hers had a right to see.

XIII.

THE GREAT ASSAY OF ART.

Macbeth ; iv.—3.

A HUSH followed the conclusion of Mrs. Greyson's song.

No one wished to speak what all felt, and when the silence was broken, it was with talk of the poet rather than of the singer. To the singing they came only by slow degrees, and over it, when at length their admiration found speech, they passed lightly.

One thing which seemed to be effected by the music was the awakening of Fenton from his gloomy reverie. He began to talk in his most extravagant and whimsical style, answering every question instantly, if with no especial care concerning the relevancy of his replies.

"What nonsense it is," he exclaimed, "to talk of any man's originating any thing. Why, when even Adam couldn't be made without material, what are we, his descendants, that we should hope to create? The authors of this old wisdom that we revamp to-day copied somebody further back, and those in turn put down what the masses felt; collected the foam which gathered on the yeasty

waves of their age. Every truth comes to the people first if they could only recognize it when it comes. It is evolved by the friction of the masses, just as a fire is set by the rubbing together of tree-boughs in primeval forests, and the dusky redman incontinently roasted in his uncontaminated innocence. The longer I live the less faith I have that a man evolves any thing from his inner consciousness. Fancies are only the lies of the mendacious brain, which perceives one thing and declares to us another."

"Go slow, Fenton," interrupted Herman, "you know our poor wits are apt to be dazzled by too much brilliancy."

"The age," Fenton rattled on, "blooms once into a great man as an aloe into a crown of bloom."

"Right in there," broke in Rangely, who longed for a share in the conversation, "just consider how necessary it is that every art producer shall be in sympathy with the human life about him. That he should take the best wherever it is to be found. There's a miserable sentiment about shutting one's self up in some dark corner, and producing some tremendous thing. Don't you know how many New York and Boston artists have gone to Europe and hermetically sealed themselves up somewhere to ferment into greatness like a jug of cider turning into vinegar in a farmer's cellar?"

"That's what made Hunt such a big fellow,"

Herman interposed; "because he took the good wherever it offered."

"But that depends upon whether a man goes direct to Nature for inspiration," declared Fenton, "or sets himself to get a living by filching the good things his neighbors have won from her."

"Hunt did go to nature; that is just where he was great."

"I think," said Fred, laughingly, "that you will appreciate the mood in which I once wrote a preface. I planned a great metaphysical and philosophical work—I was a good deal younger than I am now—and the preface was to be, 'As to the originality of these ideas, I have nothing more to say than that I do not remember that they have ever been printed with my name on the title-page.' Of course, after that declaration, I felt at liberty to take any thing I wanted from any where; but, unluckily, my book never got beyond the preface."

"I'm glad you had the sense to stop there," declared Arthur. "I forgive the preface, but I could never have forgiven the book."

Helen rose from her seat at the piano and turned up the gas a little. The effect for which the light had been lowered was secured, and it was better, she recognized, to give to her singing a certain isolation, which must be done before the conversation became so general that the change from gloom to light would not be noticed.

She wore that evening a gray silk with black

lace, a slight turning away showing the whiteness of her beautiful throat. Her jewels were cats'-eyes.

"Do you wear your cats'-eyes in honor of the cat-headed deity of the Pagans, Mrs. Greyson?" Rangely asked, as she paused near his chair, watching a burner which seemed disposed to flicker.

"No," returned she, smiling. "I am no follower of your Pasht; a goddess of 'winged words' attracts me less than a deity whose province is the sacred sphere of silence. My dress is of Mr. Fenton's designing. He is deeply versed in the subject of clothes. I even suspect him of being the true author of '*Sartor Resartus*.'"

"That brings up my pet abomination," Fenton observed, with emphasis. "I do hate Carlyle. I've even lain awake nights to think how I'd like to pound his head. The self-conceited, self-centered, self-adoring old humbug! He was the sham *par excellence* of the nineteenth century, this century of shams."

"It's something to be at the top of the heap in any thing," interpolated Herman, "even in shams."

"The trouble with Carlyle," Fenton continued, "besides his enormous egotism, was that he never got beyond the whim that the truth is something absolute. He could not abide the idea that it is merely a relative thing and must be treated as such. If he'd got above the mass of cloudy vapor he called truth, he might have gained a glimpse

of real sunlight; but his aggressive self-conceit clogged his wings. Don't you recognize that a lie is often truer than the truth?" he ran on, sitting up in his chair and speaking more rapidly; "that where the truth will often produce an erroneous impression, a lie will convey a correct one? that to be true to the spirit it is often necessary to violate the letter?"

"Your patron saint should be the god of falsehood," Helen said lightly. "I fear your allegiance to Pasht is not very sincere."

"Ah! but it is," retorted he, quickly. "My allegiance is to the goddess of 'winged words'; to the glorious mother of fictitious speech; to Pasht, the goddess of splendid, golden lying. A lie is only the truth agreeably and effectively told. *Vive la fausseté!*"

"Doubtless each interprets Pasht's attributes according to his own light," Herman observed, a little grimly.

He was only half-pleased with Fenton's badinage. But the latter, apparently, did not feel the thrust.

"Let him alone," Helen said, "he believes in nothing; he is a genuine Pagan."

"You are wrong in your idea," was Fenton's swift reply. "A true Pagan must have a belief in some god to take from his shoulders the burden of personal responsibility, or he cannot be joyous as a Pagan should. However, to-night I make

myself believe that I believe something, so it comes to much the same thing."

Helen turned and looked at him, attracted by some subtle quality in his voice.

He was sitting sidewise in his chair, holding an ivory paper-knife in his slender fingers. His cheeks burned, his eyes were bright, his lips red. He had shaken off the depression which oppressed him earlier in the evening. An air of joyous, quivering excitement pervaded him. He threw up his head with a characteristic gesture, and looked about him like one who has conquered in some desperate conflict.

"Come," the hostess said, wondering in what inward struggle he had come off victor; "you promised to assist me with the coffee. I make no boast of my house or my hospitality, gentlemen," she added, with a charming glance around, "but I warn you in advance that not to admire my coffee is to lose my friendship forever."

In answer to her ring, a servant brought in a small mortar and a pretty little bowl of whole coffee, delicately browned, and scarcely cold from its roasting. Arthur, who seemed acquainted with Mrs. Greyson's methods of procedure, began to pound the berries, roasted to perfect crispness, in the ebony mortar, reducing them to an almost impalpable powder, which diffused upon the air the entrancing odor dear to the nostrils of all artists.

The servant meantime had provided tiny cups,

a little copper ibrik and an alcohol lamp over which simmered a vessel of boiling water.

"Coffee should be prepared only over coals of perfumed wood," Helen remarked as she measured into the ibrik the small spoonful of coffee dust designed for a single cup. "But alcohol is the next best thing, it burns with such a supernatural flame."

She put into the ibrik a measure of boiling water, rested it an instant over the flame to restore the heat lost in the cooler copper, and then poured the beverage into the egg-shell cup destined for it.

"To my master first," she said, presenting the steaming cup to Herman, who received it much as one might a gift from the skies. "I learned my coffee making," she continued, "from an old Arab at Cairo, who used to say that it was one of the only two things in life worth doing, the other being the duties of religion; and it therefore should be perfectly done."

"It is simply divine," the sculptor said. "I have never really tasted coffee before. Only if it is made like this your Arab might have said there was but one thing in life, for this becomes a religious duty."

One by one with equal care were prepared cups for the others, who were neither slow nor perfunctory in their endorsement of the sculptor's praise.

XIV.

THIS IS NOT A BOON.

Othello ; iii.—3.

"'I strew these opiate flowers
On thy restless pillow ;'"

HUMMED Grant Herman to himself, taking his lonely way down the dim and dingy streets leading to the wharves where he had his abode :

"'I strew these opiate flowers —'

Oh, what a woman she is! She might be Brunhilde, or she might be Burd Helen;

"'I strew these —'

I wonder what she had to say to Fenton that she made him stay. Confound that fellow! I'm not more than half sure that I'm fond of him; though I can't bring myself fairly and squarely to dislike him. But I wish he didn't know Mrs. Greyson quite so well; he's going to be married, too. I wonder how he came to know her, any how. It is strange she doesn't wear black if she is a widow. I'd like to learn something more definite about her, but Fenton's the only one who would be likely to know, and I certainly will not

ask him. I suppose he is there yet, lounging in some sort of an outlandish shape."

Arthur was indeed still in Helen's parlor, and in as crooked an attitude as a man ever compassed. He had so managed to dispose of himself over three chairs as to give the general effect of having been suddenly arrested in the midst of an acrobatic feat of unusual difficulty, and with a cigar in his long, nervous fingers, was watching Mrs. Greyson, who occupied herself in tidying the room a little.

"We have been too good friends," she said, "to say good-by in public. The old days have been pleasant, and it is hard to give them up."

"You have insisted upon it that they are gone forever," he returned, "until I almost begin to believe you. But it is no matter. *Che sarà sarà.*"

"Yes; *che sarà sarà*," she echoed. "But now are you willing to do me a favor? I haven't asked many of you."

"You certainly deserve that I should say yes without a quibble," replied Fenton, "but your air is so serious that I do not dare run the risk; so I will merely answer,—I would like to do you a favor if I may."

She came and sat down near him, a beautiful woman, flushed and tender. It arose perhaps from the delicate sensitiveness of both that they had always instinctively avoided those chance

contacts which between lovers become so significant, confining themselves to rare hand-shakes at meeting and parting; and it may be that their very scrupulousness in this matter proves how near they had been to more emotional relations than those of simple friendship. Now when Helen laid her hand upon her friend's arm it marked an earnestness which showed how much she felt what she was about to say.

"I want you to give me something that Will gave you the other day."

Fenton's first feeling was one of annoyance, but this was quickly replaced by a desire to fathom the motives which prompted her request.

"How did you know of it?" he asked.

"By divination," she answered, with a faint smile. "Will you give it to me?"

"Why should I?"

"Because I ask you."

"To go back to that, then, why do you ask me?"

"Because I cannot bear to think of your going to be married with that in your possession. Because it is cruel for you so to wrong Miss Caldwell as to marry her while you find it possible to think it may lead you to—to use that. How can you do it! You know I've no sympathy with those who call it cowardly to take one's life. I think we've a right to do that sometimes, perhaps. But it is cowardly to

marry a woman with the deliberate idea of escaping her if you are not happy; of deserting her after you have inextricably involved her life in yours. You've no right to do that if you mean to make it a tragedy."

"She is involved in my life already," he returned gravely; "and it is a tragedy. But I am not so wholly selfish as you assume. Honestly, Helen, it is for her sake as much, at least, as my own that I wanted that vial. It is all like a scene in *The City of Dreadful Night.* I cannot be sure that I may not have to kill myself for her happiness. Heaven knows I have not found myself so good company as to have very strong reasons to suppose that any body else will."

"No," Helen said. "That is sophistry. I am a woman and I have been a wife. I know what I say. You have no right to marry any woman and allow the existence of such a possibility. It may not be logic, but it is true."

"But she will not know."

"She may not know, but she will feel. You are too finely strung not to discover to a delicate ear any discord, no matter how hard you try to conceal it; and the ear of a woman who loves is sensitive to the slightest changes. No, Arthur, if you have any love for her, any friendship for me, any respect for yourself, give me that vial."

He made no answer to her appeal for a

moment, althougn she clasped his arm more tightly and looked beseechingly into his face. It was one of those moments when he gave way to his best impulses; when he indulged in the pleasure of letting his higher nature vibrate in response to appeals addressed to it, and for the instant tasted the intoxicating pleasure of conscious virtue. He turned to scrutinize her more closely.

"But what would you do with it, Helen?"

She started a little. She had not been without a half-formed thought that she should be glad to have the deadly gift with its power of swift oblivion in her possession, although until now she had scarcely been conscious of it. But she saw that some suspicion of this was present in Arthur's mind, and must be allayed before she could hope to accomplish her purpose.

"You are wrong," she said quickly. "It is for your own sake that I want you to give it up. I will do whatever you like with it. I pledge you my word that I will never use it myself."

He still made no movement to surrender the vial, but she held out her hand.

"Come," she pleaded. "I appeal to your best self. For the sake of your mother, Arthur,—you have told me you could refuse her nothing she asked, and she would surely ask this if she were alive and knew. Give it to me."

He slowly drew from some inner pocket the little morocco case and held it in both hands looking at it.

"It is a comfort to me," he said. "It means an end of every thing. It means annihilation; it means getting rid of this nightmare of existence. I can remember when I dreaded the idea of annihilation, but I have come to feel that it is the only good to be desired. To be done with every thing and to forget every thing! Don't you see, Helen; I should never be satisfied with any thing short of omnipotence and omniscience, and annihilation is the only refuge for a nature like that. I want to be every thing; to feel the joy of the conqueror and yet not miss the keen, fine pang of the conquered—Lowell says it somewhere; to be

'Both maiden and lover'—

I forget it—'bee and clover,' you know; to be the 'red slayer' and 'the slain' both. Do you wonder I want to keep this?"

A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness came over Helen. Only half consciously she spoke a thought aloud:

"You are half mad from introspection."

He turned upon her a quizzical smile.

"I dare say," said he. "It isn't a comfortable process either. If a man has lived twenty-five years, Helen, and has not so entangled his life in in a web of circumstances that no power will ever

be able to extricate it, he may consider his first quarter century of existence a success."

He spoke with a bitter good humor not uncommon with him, and he believed himself sincere. He even mentally applauded himself for the justness of the sentiment, and was not untouched with pity for a being in whom such sadness was possible. It may have been this secret complacency that Helen detected in his face and fancied it a sign of relenting. She put out her hand and took hold of the morocco case. Arthur did not release his hold, yet neither did his grasp tighten, and she drew the dangerous gift out of his fingers.

She sprang up and locked it away in a cabinet.

"There!" she exclaimed, standing before him in a sudden revulsion of feeling, her face flushed and her eyes shining. "Now I will tell you what I think of you. I think you mean to be good to others, but—"

"You always think better of me than I deserve," he interrupted; "at least you treat me better."

"That does not necessarily indicate any leniency of judgment," retorted Helen. "I think you are self-centered, and morbid; and if marriage doesn't reform you, I give you up, for nothing will. Suffering is only an effect, the cause is sensibility; and you keep yourself abnormally sensitive by having yourself always upon the vivisection table."

She turned and walked away from him. Her

emotion was getting beyond her control. Her friendships were keen with the intensity of her passionate nature; she had not passed through this struggle lightly, and perhaps the victory unnerved her more than defeat would have done. On his part he endeavored to turn every thing off as usual with a jest.

"Have I told you Bently's latest?" he began. "He —"

"It is of no use," she said, returning to him, tears overflowing her eyes. "You cannot help my making a spectacle of myself; and you had better go. Oh, Arthur, I hope so much for you; I do so hope for happiness coming to you out of this marriage; but I shall be so lonely."

Her voice broke despite her effort. She came nearer, she hesitated an instant; then she bent over and kissed his forehead. A hot tear splashed upon his hand.

"There," she said. "Good night, and good-by. When you come back you will see what a fine steady old lady I have become."

He got on to his feet, confused, troubled, pitying her profoundly and commiserating himself upon the awkwardness of the situation. He tried to frame some sentence which might bridge the distance that seemed suddenly to have opened between them. Like a farewell, a renunciation or a dedication, that kiss impressed upon him a certain remoteness new and oppressive.

"Bah!" he broke off. "I can say nothing, Helen. I have thus far served in an already sufficiently unhappy world only to make people more miserable still. I'm not worth a faintest regret. Good-night. If I can ever serve you—Good-by!"

XV.

'TWAS WONDROUS PITIFUL.

Othello ; i—3.

HELEN'S first conscious sensation next morning was a feeling of loss, which resolved itself into a deep sadness when she was fairly awake and realized that Arthur had gone. She had not considered how much his companionship and friendliness had been to her until now, when she felt them lost. A woman so lonely yet so affectionate as Helen could not spare from her life a friend so dear as Fenton had been without being much moved. So strong had been her attachment, and so intimate had been the acquaintance between herself and Arthur, that Dr. Ashton had believed his wife to love the artist; but Helen, closely questioning her heart, was able to assure herself that warm as had been her regard for Fenton, he had never awakened in her bosom a single thrill of love. She was sad this morning with the sorrow of a broken friendship, not of a blighted passion.

She sighed deeply, the sigh of one but too well accustomed to life's disappointments, and arose with the determination to lose herself in her work,

and to shake off if possible the sadness which seemed to paralyze her energies and enervate her whole being.

The gown which she had worn upon the previous evening lay over a chair, giving out, as she lifted it, an odor of tobacco smoke. Some remark made by Grant Herman about the fumes which had filled the little parlor came into her mind, giving a new current to her thoughts. She unconsciously fell to thinking of the sculptor, and, by a natural connection of ideas, of Ninitta, who was still nominally posing for her.

Partly from interest in the girl herself and partly from the perception that it pleased her master to have the Italian remain with her, she had retained Ninitta, although the bas-relief was so far advanced that the model was hardly needed. She had even set herself, by those unobtrusive ways at the command of gracious women, to win the girl's confidence, not so much for the sake of hearing her story as to give the waif so strangely cast in her path the feeling that the friendship she so sorely needed was within her reach. It had resulted, however, in her hearing Ninitta's history. Many women have no idea of returning kindness save by unreserved confidence, and although Ninitta was perhaps scarcely to be reckoned among these extremists, she yet found so much comfort in pouring out her sorrows to one who could both sympathize and appreciate,

that little by little the whole pathetic tale was told.

"I did not understand," Ninitta said once in her broken English, "when he left Rome. It was as if somebody had taken my life away somehow. I couldn't make it seem that I was really alive all the same, though I knew it could not be his fault. He would not have done it if he had known. You do not believe he would have left me if he had known the truth?"

"No," Helen answered. "He could not have left you if he had known. It was because he was hurt so much, and that could only be because he loved you so much."

"He loved me so much," poor Ninitta repeated murmuringly, "he loved me so much."

And all that day she followed Helen with wistful eyes, as if she longed to hear her say again those precious words.

"I cannot tell you what it was like in Paris," she said at another time. "In Rome they all knew me. They knew I was betrothed, and no one ever troubled me. But in Paris it was different. Oh, I hate Paris! And it was so cruel that he was not there. It was so dreadful that he should be on the other side of that horrible sea!"

The girl was so self-forgetful in these revelations, she spoke always with such an unshaken faith in Herman and was so free from any thought of blaming him, that Helen could not but be

touched. She soothed poor Ninitta as well as she was able, having power to promise nothing, seeing no way out of the entanglement, yet at least showing to the lonely Italian that her woman's heart bled for her sorrow if she might not alleviate it. Sometimes she felt like going to the sculptor and entreating him to take pity upon the girl who so adoringly loved him. Once when the model had told her how just as she had saved by long, painful economy, nearly money enough to pay the passage to America it was stolen and she was forced to begin the slow process over again, Helen impulsively left her studio and found herself on the very threshold of Herman's door before she realized what she had been about to do. By what authority was she to interfere in a matter like this? If Ninitta loved the sculptor who had long ago ceased to return her affection, could matters be helped by an unloving marriage? It was not for her, moreover, to give unasked her advice to such a man as she knew Grant Herman to be. If he consulted her, she reflected, she might present the pathetic, touching story which Ninitta had told her, but she had plainly no pretext for forcing her feelings upon her master unsought.

She turned and went slowly up the stairs toward her little room; but suddenly she paused. She had all at once become conscious that she desired eagerly to know the nature of the sculptor's feelings toward his old love. Why, she asked

herself, was she so interested in what after all did not personally concern her. A quick emotion, almost too vague to be called a thought, made her cheek flame.

"No, no," she said half aloud. "It is only that I am touched by Ninitta's sadness. It is nothing more."

But her breath came more quickly, and it was with difficulty that upon re-entering her studio she assumed a quiet mien, lest her model should guess at her unfulfilled errand.

On the morning following the meeting of the Pagans at her rooms, Helen was alone in her studio. She had told Ninitta she should be late and the latter was therefore tardy in arriving. Mrs. Greyson uncovered her bas-relief, now rapidly nearing completion, and stood before it, examining critically its merits and defects. A familiar step in the passage, a tap at the door, and Grant Herman joined her.

"You look as fresh as ever this morning," he said. "I feared that the entertaining of such a company of Bohemians would have tired you out."

"No, indeed," she returned. "I am of far too much endurance to be worn out by any thing of that sort. I have a drop of Bohemian blood in my veins myself, I think, and I like to meet men as men—when they are simply good fellows together, I mean. A woman usually sees men in an attitude of either deference or defense, and there

is something inspiriting to her in being occasionally received as a comrade."

"There are few women who can be received so," returned Herman. "I suppose it requires both an especial temperament and especial experiences to render a woman capable of being a comrade to men."

The talk drifted away to general and indifferent subjects, broken here and there by allusions and criticisms relating to the Flight of the Months, and not infrequently dropping into brief silences. One of these Herman broke by saying abruptly:

"You do not know how your song has haunted me all night. I have been saying over and over to myself

> "'I strew these opiate flowers
> On thy restless pillow.'

And, indeed, I longed for some such soporific myself before morning. Your coffee or your song, or—yourself,"—he hesitated over the last word—"kept me very effectually awake."

"It must have been the coffee; there was little potency in either of the other causes."

"There is much," he returned resolutely, advancing a step nearer. "Mrs. Greyson, I have not wasted the night. I have thought out a great many things; the first and chief being in regard to yourself."

His tone, the piercing glow of his eyes, warned

Helen what was coming. She thought of Ninitta, and retreated a step.

"It is true," the sculptor continued, as if answering the doubt implied by her movement, "that I—"

The door opened softly and Ninitta came in.

His outstretched hand dropped; the words died upon his lips. He turned from one woman to the other an appealing look of hopeless sadness and left the studio in silence.

It was characteristic of Helen's generosity that her first thought should be of the pain which Ninitta must feel. One glance at the model was sufficient to show that the Italian had comprehended enough of the interrupted scene to be made wretched; but it did not then occur to Mrs. Greyson that to Ninitta's jealous soul, unsuspicious of Herman, the only explanation of a fondness between the sculptor and his pupil lay in an effort on the part of the latter to win from the model her rightful and long betrothed lover.

XVI.

CRUEL PROOF OF THIS MAN'S STRENGTH.

As You Like It ; i.—2.

GRANT HERMAN sat in his studio in the gathering twilight thinking gloomily. However little Mrs. Greyson suspected the tumult which would be aroused in Ninitta's breast by the misadventure of the morning, the sculptor was too well aware of the Italian's passionate nature not to dread the consequences of the jealousy she was sure to feel. He knew, moreover, that Ninitta's rage would vent itself not upon him but upon Helen, and he wondered how best to avert the danger that threatened.

He debated with himself, too, how much he owed to the girl who gave her life up so unreservedly to him. His old love—"call it rather mere boyish passion," he thought scornfully—was long since dead beyond hope ; yet the devotion which it had awakened in Ninitta burned on as steadily as ever. Had he now a right to repulse the love he had himself called into being ; to throw aside the fondness he had himself fostered and which he had once prized above measure.

"No," he thought, "a thousand times no. A

man must be a villain who would not marry a girl under such circumstances. I am hers; the fact that I have changed is my misfortune, not her fault. If I have any manliness about me, I won't let things go on in this way any longer. I'll marry Ninitta. It is the smallest reparation I can make for the long years of pain I have caused her. There is no other course for me.

"But I do not love her, and a woman, they say, always instinctively feels it when a man's heart is not hers. Nonsense! That is only a cowardly excuse. At least Ninitta would never be troubled. She has not known so much love that she can draw very sharp comparisons. No; she will be satisfied; and I—well, if a man is such a devilish fool as I have been, it remains for him to pay the penalty. Oh, if youth only knew!"

He sighed deeply and began to walk up and down the studio, in which the dusk was gathering thickly. A last faint gleam from a window high in the riverward wall fell upon one of the mutilated goddesses in the gallery. Herman looked up, contemplating the phantom-like head gloomily. Something in its pose, or perhaps more truly something in his own mind, suggested a faint likeness to Helen, as if it were her ghost looking down from some far height upon the conflict of his soul.

"Ah!" he cried hotly to himself. "And she? How can I give up the hope of winning her? What was a boy's foolish fancy to the passion of

a man—and for such a woman! She is half goddess. No, no; I cannot do it. I cannot marry this Italian peasant, this model that has who knows what history! I will not; I owe something to myself, to my art. What is the simple happiness of Ninitta to my art? I should be a fool to ignore how much more to the world my own well-being is worth than is hers; and what could I not do with the inspiration of the other! Oh, my God!"

The darkness grew. The phantom faded imperceptibly away. He was left alone in the darkness to fight out his battle. He marched with great strides, avoiding obstacles by a certain sixth sense born of constant familiarity with the place. He fought manfully, persuading himself that his scruples were as idle as air, remnants of the long since outgrown superstitions of his childhood. He defiantly claimed the right to be true to his powers, to his genius, rather than to an empirical standard erected by narrow moralists. He should be thankful that he had escaped entangling his life by that absurd marriage in Rome seven years ago, and that he was now free to win a wife worthy of himself and of his art.

Yet he cut through all the meshes of logic he had himself been weaving, by striking his strong hands together there in the dark, and crying aloud, his voice startling him in the stillness:

"My God ! What a poltroon I have become!

Shall I cast on others the burden of my own mistakes?"

And seizing hat and cloak he left the studio, taking his way towards the narrow street where Ninitta lodged, hastening to ask her to marry him before his resolution faltered.

XVII.

THIS "WOULD" CHANGES.

Hamlet; iv.—7.

HERMAN found Ninitta alone in the attic which served her for a home in this bleak northern city, so far and so different from her own sunny Capri.

Bare and half furnished as was the room, the girl had contrived to impart to it a certain air which removed it from the common-place. A bit of flimsy drapery, begged from some studio, hung over one of the windows; a rude print of the Madonna was pinned to the wall, and under it, on the wooden table, was a bunch of withered flowers. They were roses which Helen had given Ninitta, and the Italian, returning home that day, had in her jealous rage thrown them to the floor and trampled upon them. Then remembering that they had been offered to the Madonna, she had been seized with a superstitious fear, and carefully restoring the battered flowers, had eagerly vowed a fresh bunch to the Holy Mother if she might be forgiven this sacrilege.

But the most beautiful article in the room was a cast of a woman's shoulder. It had been mod-

eled by Herman in the earliest days of his acquaintance with Ninitta, when she had been still only his model and not his betrothed. He was touched as he looked at it now. Yellow with time and soiled by its various journeyings, it still preserved unmarred its lovely shape, exquisite curve melting into exquisite curve as softly and sweetly as in those glowing days when he had molded it under the sky of Italy.

He looked from the cast to Ninitta. He had only seen her at the studio, and he experienced a faint feeling of surprise at detecting a subtle difference in her here at home. It was nothing so tangible that he could have told by what means he received the impression, yet it was sufficiently definite to make him lose something of the freedom with which he had always addressed her. She was no longer simply the model, she was an Italian woman in her own home.

The years during which they had been separated had formed and strengthened Ninitta's character. If Herman had not before noted the alteration, it was due in part to his pre-occupation and in part to the force of old habit which made her manner toward him much the same as formerly. To-night he began to appreciate the change in her, and he felt the awkwardness which always results from the discovery that we must adapt ourselves to a modified condition in a friend.

On her side Ninitta was naturally surprised at

seeing the sculptor. She had come to regard as hopeless all speculations upon his intentions, and she had waited patiently until he should choose to show her favor, tacitly acknowledging his right to do whatever should be his good pleasure. Had he come at any time and said, "Ninitta, I am here to marry you," she would gladly but quietly have made ready to follow where he chose to lead, even to the world's end. Equally, had he said, "Ninitta, I have come to say good-by; you will never see me again," she would have acquiesced without a murmur, and then, perhaps, have taken her own life. As long as it was his simple wish, uninfluenced by the will of another, she would never have questioned.

Now, however, all passive acquiescence was at an end. Since the scene in Helen's studio, Ninitta had an object upon which to expend all her energies, and she even almost forgot to love Herman in the intensity of her sudden jealous hatred of Mrs. Greyson. Yesterday Grant Herman would have found a woman not unlike the Ninitta of old times, tender, loving, pathetically submissive; today he was confronted by a fury, only restrained by the respect for his presence born of long habit.

"Good evening!" he said gently, as he entered, his mood softened by the struggle through which he had passed in his studio.

"Good evening!" she answered defiantly, in Italian. "So you are not with her!"

"What!" he exclaimed.

He had been wholly unprepared for this outburst, and for the instant was too surprised to at all understand it.

A sudden rage seemed to seize Ninitta, which swept away all barriers of restraint.

"*Si, si, si,*" she cried, "I am not blind! What if you are my betrothed, when this woman comes to entrap you, to bewitch you with an evil eye, to steal your soul! Yes, yes; you are not with her to-night as you were last night. Did I not see you myself come out of her house?"

"Stop!" he said in his most commanding tone, but without anger.

The calmness and decision of the manner arrested her. She sank back into a chair, regarding him with defiant eyes.

"So you have followed me," continued Herman, speaking with painful slowness, so that every word seemed to poor Ninitta to fall upon her like a curse; "so you have played the spy upon me. Ah!"

As he looked at her she began to cower. She shrank back in her seat, putting up her hands to shield her face from his gaze.

"Yet I meant to marry you," he said, half to himself, although still addressing her. "I came to-night to say, 'Come, Ninitta, let us take up the broken romance that a cruel mistake interrupted there in Rome.' I had long ago outgrown my

old fancy, but I meant to be true to my promise to you. I meant to give up even my ambition for your sake; to make your life happy and secure. And this is your trust in me! If you really loved me, to track me like a thief would have been impossible to you. And where have you learned this trick of playing the spy?" he went on with growing wrath, becoming more and more cruel with every word. "It is a relic of your Paris life, I fancy. It is hardly a resource to which a good girl would be driven. I at least believed you when you told me you had been true to me."

He spoke rapidly, aggressively. The fact that he was outraging his own instincts in beating with bitter words the girl who bowed before him with drooping head and disheveled hair made him but the more harsh. To fall from the height of self-sacrifice into a pool of vulgar intrigue! Bah! His disgust at himself for ever having known this woman seemed too great to be borne.

Yet under all his passionate protest and repulsion he was conscious that he doubted what he was himself saying with so much vehemence; that he secretly believed Ninitta to be true and pure, and that to her Italian blood, to her peasant nurture, was due the espionage in which she had been self-betrayed. The sting of conscience, too, in the knowledge that the model's jealousy of Helen was well founded, the humiliation of finding his feelings and motives discovered, increased his irrita-

tion. He felt a base desire to stab and humiliate Ninitta, but for whom he might be free to win the one woman he had ever loved; and the more his denunciations recoiled to hurt himself, the more eagerly he poured them out, as in some moods of mental anguish one finds relief in the pain of self-inflicted physical hurts.

"Yes," he said, more and more completely abandoning control of himself; "yes, this tells sufficiently what you have learned in Paris."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, flinging herself at his feet and groveling there. "No, no! For the love of the Virgin, signor, not that! I have been good. Oh, for the love of God, signor! For the love of God!"

She was shaken by the storm of sobs in which her words ended. She got hold of his feet and refused to rise when he attempted to lift her. Her long hair, escaped from its stilletto, fell about her face. Even in this agitated moment the sculptor in Grant Herman noted with a sharp, æsthetic pleasure the beautiful curves of her neck and shoulders.

"Pity," she went on between her agonized sobs. "Oh, forgive me! I will do any thing you wish. I will go away and leave you."

He stooped and raised her by main force, yet tenderly.

"There, there, Ninitta," he said, "I was wrong. I do believe you are a good girl; but you should not have played the spy."

He soothed her as well as he was able, her violence spending itself in passionate tears. She drew herself away from him, and sat down again in the chair she had been occupying. She put up her hands to her head, twisting the loose tresses into a great coil. The sleeve of her dress, unfastened in her agitation, fell back from her rounded arm. The superb lines of her figure were displayed by her attitude. Her face, flushed with weeping and lighted by the still tear-wet eyes, if not beautiful was appealing and pitiful. Some fiber touched of old vibrated anew in his being. He made a step forward.

"Ninitta," he said, "I came to-night to ask you to marry me at once; to fulfill the promise I made you so long ago."

The words and the tone both were tender, but he had said those same words in anger just before.

"But you do not love me," she responded, her arms dropping pathetically into her lap. "You have said it."

"But I was angry," answered Herman, for the moment almost believing that his old love was re-awakened. "I did not mean you to believe it."

"If you do love me," she said, a new look coming into her eyes, "you will promise me never to see her again."

He started back as if from a blow. His frail dream of passion was shattered like a bubble at her words. A wave of bitter self-contempt that

its existence had been possible swept over him. The blood surged into his cheeks. Ninitta saw the flush and her eye kindled.

"Promise me," she repeated. "It is little for love to ask. It is my right."

With instinctive feminine guile she leaned towards him in an attitude so beautiful, so appealing that even now he was moved. But with this emotion came, too, a subtle if now fainter sense of degradation that he was susceptible to this dangerous fascination, with a painful consciousness of how wide a moral gulf had opened between them by the anger and vulgar jealousy which Ninitta displayed. It is not impossible, too, that his instinctive clinging to Helen was a stronger power than he knew; while still through all his mingled emotions ran the resolve he had made to give himself up to his old betrothed.

"No," he said; yet as he moved slowly towards the door he had the air of a man who still deliberates.

She threw herself back in her seat with a touching gesture of despair, but also with a gleam of malice in her eyes, which he, turning with his hand upon the latch, caught and understood.

"No," he repeated with final decision. "No, no!"

XVIII.

BEDECKING ORNAMENTS OF PRAISE.

Love's Labor's Lost; ii.—1.

FENTON had returned to Boston with his bride, but as yet Helen had not seen him. One morning late in March, however, he came to call.

"I could not come before," he said after the first greeting, "'I have married a wife,' and the amount of arrangement and adjustment implied in that statement is simply astounding."

"I am glad to see you at last," she returned. "And your wife, is she well?"

"My wife," replied he, with a little hesitancy over the unfamiliar term, "is well. Cannot you come to see us before that dreadful reception through which I am to be dragged? I'd like you to know Edith in a different way from the crowd."

Helen crossed the room and sat down in her favorite chair by the window.

"He ought to understand," was her thought. "Why cannot he see that it is impossible for his wife and me to harmonize. We have no common ground."

"I shall be glad to," she said aloud, inwardly shrinking at the need of speaking disingenuously to one with whom she had so long been upon terms of frankness. "I will come very soon; to-day or to-morrow. To-day, though, I must go and see my bas-relief. It is all ready to be cut for the furnace; I only want to take a last look at it, to be sure that every thing is right. If it will not bore you," she added, a little hesitatingly, "you might come too; it is your last chance to find fault to any advantage, for any changes must be made at once."

"I'd like to go," answered her friend, looking at his watch, "if I can get back to luncheon. Yes, there's plenty of time."

"Benedick, the married man," laughed Helen. "That I should ever live to see this air of domesticity!"

They crossed the Common, chatting idly, and both conscious that the frankness of their old intercourse was somehow lacking; that it was necessary to begin a new adjustment upon a basis different from the former one. They talked upon indifferent subjects, of what had occurred during the three weeks of Arthur's absence, playing the part of amiability without pleasure, endeavoring to simulate the old relations which no longer had real existence.

"Oh, Arthur," Helen laughed, suddenly, "let's not go on in this way! Let us quarrel, or some-

thing. Say a wicked epigram; do any thing, only don't be so eminently amiable!"

"My head is as empty of ideas," he returned laughing, in his turn, "as is a modern title-page of punctuation points. Besides, Edith has forbidden wicked epigrams."

"Does she therefore suppose she can suppress them?"

"Oh, I don't know," responded Fenton, good-humoredly. "I am not in as epigrammatic a frame of mind as I was."

"'Tis a good sign."

"Yes; a sign I am growing inane and respectable."

"I can imagine you one about as easily as the other."

"That is bitter-sweet; a compliment and a flout."

"If I had said that," Helen observed, smiling, "you would have retorted, with a look of gloomy solemnity, that most things in life are bitter-sweet; unless, indeed, you felt called upon to phrase it that it had the advantage of most earthly matters by not being wholly bitter."

"Was I ever guilty of such commonplace attempts at epigrams as that?" returned Arthur. "If so it is certainly a good thing that I have given up repartee for matrimony."

"Oh, that is brilliant beside many of your attempts, I assure you. And as for your giving them up—I reserve my decision."

"You shall see, skeptic," he said lightly. "I expect to change the face of the whole world if necessary."

"It is a common error of ardent temperaments," she returned pleasantly, but with evident sincerity, "to assume that a state of feeling can change the world."

"But I must, I will," he began eagerly. Then the light died out of his face and he ended with a shrug.

Helen put up her hand with an impulsive gesture, as if about to speak.

Then letting her arms fall by her side, she turned to unlock the studio door, which by this time they had reached.

The bas-relief was still shrouded in its damp envelopes, which Helen carefully removed, keeping Fenton away, that he might first see the work as a whole, and not lose its legitimate effect by catching fragmentary glimpses as it was uncovered. When at last it was fully disclosed, she called him to her as she stood before it.

"By Jove! That's stunning!" he exclaimed, after an instant's pause, which gave him time to see it fairly. "Helen, you have outdone yourself! That figure is simply superb. I hadn't an idea you would come out so well. I'm wonderfully proud of you."

"You are more amiable than ever," she responded; but her flushed cheek showed that she

was touched by his earnest praise. "For that figure I have to thank Ninitta's posing. She is an inspiration."

"But Ninitta did not inspire that splendid head," observed Arthur, pointing with his cane at the December, "and you evidently did that *con amore*. By Jove! It's Grant Herman, as I live!"

As he spoke he turned and saw Ninitta on the threshold.

"Shall you want me to-day?" the latter asked of Helen.

"What made that girl look so savage?" Fenton questioned as the door closed behind the model.

"She perhaps chooses to be jealous of me," Helen replied composedly.

"*Elle a peutêtre raison.*"

"Perhaps."

"You say that too calmly by half," was his gay response. "Yet as every work a woman does has a man for its end—I learned that from the classics; Penelope, you know, and even washwoman Nausicaä—I suppose it is fair to assume this had. Only who is the man?"

Helen flushed slightly. She recalled the ambition with which she had begun this work, to make the man beside her praise its completion; and she was conscious that before she finished it was the praise of Herman for which she strove.

"It is filthy lucre that inspires me," she replied steadily. "I need no other incentive."

They walked about the studio, talking of the bas-relief as seen from different points; of how it was to be cut for firing; and on the safe ground of art they forgot all personal constraints, until the striking of a clock aroused Fenton to a sense of the flight of time.

"I must go," he said. "I am no end glad I came. The truth is I am not very well acquainted with this married man, and it is comfortable to slip back occasionally into a familiar bachelor mood. However," he continued with his brightest smile, "I like the Benedick far better than I should ever have dreamed possible; and his wife is charming. And I want to say, too," he added, "that I have a thousand times thanked you for taking that vial before I went to be married. I'm in a spasm of virtuousness just now, and it is pleasant to remember that I did not have it that day."

They went down stairs and out into the soft, spring-like day, sauntering homeward in a happy and accordant mood. Arthur urged Helen's going home to lunch with himself and Edith, but to Helen the morning was far too precious to be ended in a possibly inharmonious meeting with Mrs. Fenton.

And that afternoon Herman sent for Mrs. Greyson in all haste. Ninitta had vented her

jealous rage upon the bas-relief, destroying the head of December which she heard Fenton say must have been done *con amore*, and the beautiful May for which she herself had posed.

XIX.

NOW HE IS FOR THE NUMBERS.

Romeo and Juliet ; ii.—4.

MRS. FENTON'S wedding reception was largely attended. However strongly the artist might savor of Bohemianism, his wife was connected with certain prominent Philistines, and he had exhibited a most remarkable readiness to have them present in force.

"Into the camp of Philistia itself," muttered Rangely to Bently, as they elbowed their way through the crowd. "By the great horn spoon, if there isn't Peter Calvin! Arthur calls him the Great Boston Art Greek. That ever I should live to see the humbug under Fenton's roof-tree!"

"Pshaw!" returned Bently with an oath. "What a set of rubbishy old fobs and dowagers there is here any way. Is this the kind of people Fenton means to know?"

"Means to know," echoed Rangely. "He's got to go down on his marrow bones to get them to consent to know him. They patronize art, and that means that they snub artists."

"Humph!" exclaimed Bently. "Is he sycophant enough to do that?"

"That's as you look at it. His wife probably decides the matter for him. She very naturally likes to know what she would call 'nice people.' How those women chatter! I wonder what they find to talk about."

"Not necessarily any thing. They always talk all the same whether they've any thing to say or not."

"How much of life is wasted in enduring people for whom one does not care," philosophized Rangely, looking over the throng which filled to overflowing the Fentons' somewhat limited rooms. "Ah! There is Dr. Ashton. How do you do, Doctor?"

"As well as could be expected," the Doctor answered, "in this antiquated assembly."

"Oh, Boston is only an antiquarian society," laughed Rangely, "and these old tabbies are all honorary members. By Jove, though, there are some awfully pretty girls here."

"I've observed that Boston girls are apt to be pretty when they give their minds to it," remarked Bently. "Not when they wander round with Homer under one arm and Virgil under the other and dyspepsia in the stomach, but when they are deliberately frivolous."

The throng separated them at this moment, and Dr. Ashton went in search of host and hostess. Arthur caught sight of his tall figure, and made a sign at once of recognition and summons. Strug-

gling between a young Episcopal clergyman and a corpulent old lady, Dr. Ashton made his way with difficulty to the spot where his friend was standing.

"You are the most married man I know, Arthur," was his greeting. "Brigham Young wasn't a circumstance. I have been half an hour crossing the room."

"Dr. Ashton, Edith; my wife, Will," was the only reply Fenton made, unless one could interpret the quizzical glance he bestowed upon his friend.

"I feel already acquainted with you," was Mrs. Fenton's remark, "I have heard of you so often. My husband has spoken to me so much of his friends that it is hard for me to realize that I do not know them myself."

"You have been very little in Boston, I believe," Dr. Ashton said, looking at her in a sudden surprise at remembering that he had seen her face before.

"Very little," replied she, "I have been abroad a great part of my life and—"

New claims upon her attention ended the conversation with that charming abruptness characteristic of such an occasion, and the Doctor was left to elbow his way out of the crush, with the sense of having done all that would be required of him. He found a corner where he could watch the hostess and fell to wondering whether Mrs.

Fenton in her turn remembered their previous meeting.

Edith Fenton was a slender, nun-like woman, too pale, with a smile of wonderful attractiveness. "A woman to wear lilies," was the way Grant Herman put it afterward; a remark which conveyed well the purity of her face. Her ease of manner showed familiarity with the conventionalities of life, yet in some vague way she seemed removed from the people by whom she was to-day surrounded.

"She has been brought up in the old narrow ways," Dr. Ashton reflected, "but there are great possibilities about her. She'll either be the making of Fenton or send him to the dogs. She will scarcely find much room in her house for many of his former friends, I fancy."

He stood watching the people and amusing himself with cynical speculations until he saw Grant Herman's great figure among the guests. He knew him but slightly and looked at him with an indifference which a couple of hours later he regretted. Herman cared little for the formalities of the occasion, and very likely might have gone away without even being presented to the hostess had not Fred Rangely taken him in charge and brought him safely through that ceremony. Now the sculptor was looking for Mrs. Greyson, of whom he soon caught sight, when he began making his way towards her. She however perceived

him, and with the feeling that she could not bear to meet him in public just at this time, she evaded him by slipping into the window where her husband was ensconced.

"Take me out of this, please," she said, "I am tired."

He gave her his arm without speaking, and together they made their way from the room.

"I want to talk to you," he remarked easily. "Mayn't I walk home with you?"

When she was ready they went together out into the starlit streets. Neither spoke at first, each carrying on a train of thought to which the other could have no adequate clew.

"Who is Arthur's wife?" Dr. Ashton asked at length. "I know she was a Miss Caldwell, that she came from Providence, and that she has been an orphan so short a time that they had a perfectly quiet wedding; but that is the extent of my knowledge. Is she an artist?"

"An amateur," answered Helen. "She studied in Paris. He met her there. She is a relative, I forget just how far or near, of Peter Calvin. She seems to me an icicle. Think of Arthur's marrying a *religieuse!*"

"What is his game, I wonder," said her companion thoughtfully. "Do you know when she was in Paris? Was it when we were there."

"Let me see," Helen responded, with a mental calculation. "Yes; she must have been there the

last year we were. Why? Did you ever meet her?"

"Perhaps," was the careless reply.

They reached Helen's door as he spoke.

"Come in," she said. "Fortunately I can make you a salad. It is a long time since we had a *petit souper* together. I have, too, something to say to you."

He followed her to the pretty parlor, and sat idly chatting while she made her preparations for the supper.

XX.

THE WORLD IS STILL DECEIVED.

Merchant of Venice; iii.—2.

IT was a dainty little table to which Helen invited her husband when every thing was ready. The china was of odd bits picked up here and there abroad, and it was now disposed with an artist's eye for color and grouping. A tall bottle of Rhine wine had come from some mysterious nook, and beside it were a pair of fine old German glasses, frail as bubbles.

"I have always to offer my guests Rhine wine," Helen said, "for I've no glasses for any thing else. Arthur is ungracious enough to object. He does not like white wine as you do."

"I do like it," her guest answered, drawing the cork, "and so does Arthur, only he does not know it. He has somewhere stumbled upon the whim of pretending not to, and he can deceive himself more completely than any other man I ever saw. Rhine wine is the most poetic of beverages. It should go down like oil and only leave a fragrance like a poet's dream behind it."

"That is quite a rhapsody for you, Will; only your cool tone gives it a certain cynical flavor."

"I mean all I say, I assure you. Champagne is vulgar. It is the drink of self-made snobs and cads who wish to pass for men of the world; but Rhine wine is the drink for poets and artists."

"I am delighted to hear you defend it; it is very good of you, when I happen to know you are not fond of it. It is a graceful return for my inhospitality in not giving you your favorite Burgundy, but I haven't a drop."

"Oh, don't mind the wine! I came to see you," Dr. Ashton said, with his delightful smile. "How droll it was to see Arthur to-day. Do you think he has really persuaded himself he is in love with his wife?"

"Arthur has great adaptability," Helen returned. "I think he believes he is in love. I'm sure I hope you'll not feel it your duty to tell him he isn't."

"I'm not Mephistopheles," answered Dr. Ashton, smiling, and watching appreciatively as she made the salad.

Mrs. Greyson had dressed carefully for the reception from which she had just come, and her cream-colored cashmere, with soft old thread lace, and a bunch of amber-hued roses at the throat, became her as only a dress chosen by an artist could. It fell away from her exquisite arms, and from among the lace rose her beautiful neck, the stuff of her gown setting off the lovely texture of her skin to perfection.

"I must not ruin my best attire," she said lightly, gathering it up. "Now Ninitta has spoiled my bas-relief, it may be long before I get more. I owe you a good deal, Will, for letting me study modeling in Paris."

"It was pure selfishness," he returned good-humoredly. "I wanted to keep you busy so that I might go my own way. But what about your bas-relief? Who spoiled it? Who is Ninitta, and what has she against you?"

"That is what I wanted to tell you."

She did not speak again for a moment, seemingly intent upon the exact measurement of the ingredients of her salad. In reality she was considering how best to present what she had to say. She mentally ran over the points she wished to make, becoming thereby conscious that she had herself come to no definite conclusions upon the topic she was about to discuss. She looked furtively at her husband, noting his attitude, his expression, and whatever her past experience enabled her to construe into indications of his mood. As well and as long as she had known this man, she was still ignorant of the key to his nature—that feeling or motive which, touched in an ultimate appeal, would always insure a response. Conscience is the fruit of the tree of experience, and, taken in this sense, every man must be possessed of a conscience, which by its inner voice re-enforces any pleading which coincides with its dictates.

What was the nature of her husband's inward monitor Helen had never been able to discover and at this moment she realized keenly her ignorance.

"Will," she said earnestly, laying down her salad-fork and spoon, "I think it is wrong for us to live as we do."

He shrugged his shoulders, looking at her curiously.

"I cannot flatter myself that you care to return to the old uncomfortableness."

She flushed warmly, with a keen pang of mingled pain and indignation.

"No," she replied. "No; never that. It is not for ourselves, but for others."

"Others! Fenton?"

She flushed more deeply still.

"I have told you already that you are mistaken about my regard for Arthur. It was not he I meant."

She served her guest, and sat playing nervously with her fork as he ate and praised the salad.

"Mr. Herman sent for me the other afternoon," she began again, forcing herself to speak calmly. "My model Ninitta is very fond of him, and chose to be jealous of his praise of my work. It might have all gone over without an outburst, I suppose, if she had not had her attention called to the fact that I had modeled his head for December. Why she had never happened to notice it I don't know; she was in the studio constantly."

"Not when he was there?" queried Dr. Ashton, holding up his graceful, antique wine-glass and admiring it.

"No, not when he was there," repeated his wife. "She had pounded off the head when he sent for me with a mallet she had picked up in his studio. I never saw him in such a rage. She was gone when I got there. She didn't make any attempt to conceal it. She came stalking melodramatically into his studio with the mallet and laid it down. 'There,' said she, 'now kill me. I have broken her work.' It was like a fashion magazine story. He thought at first she had gone mad."

"So she had. Women are always insane when they are jealous. I wish I had Arthur's knack at epigram, and I'd make that sound original."

"He says he was very harsh," Helen continued, "though I fancy he could not be quite that in any circumstances. It was very hard," she added with a sigh. "It was like looking at a dead child to see my best work ruined. It was really a part of myself."

"But can't it be repaired? It was in the clay, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but I fear for my exhausted enthusiasm. I can never do it as it was before. My poor, unlucky December."

She toyed with her glass absently, apparently for the moment forgetting her companion, who

continued his supper with no less relish than before. He watched her keenly, however, fully aware that there was more to be told. He was a man too accustomed to follow any desire or indulge any whim not to notice appreciatively, as he had noticed many times before, how beautiful were the curves of his wife's arms and throat, and with what grace her head was poised. He had once defined a liberal man as one who could appreciate his own wife, and he would have been far more insensible than he was, if, with this beautiful woman before him he had not been, judged by his own standard, extremely liberal.

"And this has what to do with the question of our relations being known?" he asked.

She started from her reverie, the red again showing faintly in her cheek.

"It is hardly fair," she answered in a tone softer and lower than that in which she had been speaking, "to tell you all that Mr. Herman said. He wishes to marry me."

"And you wish you were free to have it so?"

There was once more a pause. Helen busied herself in an elaborate arrangement of the torn lettuce leaves upon her plate, seemingly concentrating all her thoughts upon forming them into an intricate figure.

"Will," she said, suddenly, lifting her eyes and leaning towards him, "I do not know how to make you understand. I haven't succeeded so well in

my attempts thus far in life as to be very sanguine of doing it now. You do not know how ashamed and contemptible I felt for being party to the deception that made it possible for him to speak so to me. He was so honest, so earnest; he was so unconscious of the barriers between us. I felt that I had done him such an irreparable wrong by concealing the truth. He had a right to know that I am a married woman."

"Did you tell him?"

"No; but I must. I want to be free from the promise we made to each other."

"It all comes," returned her husband without any show of irritation, "from my telling Fenton."

"I cannot see what that has to do with it. I like the absence from questioning, the avoidance of gossip, as much as you can; but it makes me feel as if I were a living lie to have Mr. Herman bringing his honest love to me to be met only by deception. It is cruel and it is wrong."

"That depends entirely upon how you define wrong," retorted Dr. Ashton coolly. "I do not see why it is wrong for me to decline to sacrifice my convenience to Mr. Herman's sentiment. But without going into the question of metaphysics, let us look at the matter reasonably. Do you love Mr. Herman?"

Notwithstanding the studied nonchalance of his tone, a glance into his eyes might have shown Helen how much importance he attached to her

answer. A woman is peculiarly dangerous when she is telling one man that another loves her. The masculine greed of possession is aroused by the mere thought of a possible rival, and Dr. Ashton was conscious at this moment of a kindling desire himself to win Helen's love, which he knew perfectly well had never been his.

"That is not at all relevant," was her reply, her eyes downcast. "The question of honesty is enough now. At least I respect Mr. Herman, and I must treat him squarely, as you would say. You have always told me to be 'a square fellow,' you know," she added, raising her glance with a faint smile.

"But if you tell him," said her husband, with a subtle tinge of impatience in his tone, "others must know. You can't go on letting one after another into the secret without its soon becoming public property."

"Why not then?" she responded. "I wonder we have been able to keep it so long. It is sure to be known now you have come home. I do not mean to proclaim it upon the housetops; but to let it work out if it will. What harm can it do?"

"It will harm me. My life is not so secluded as yours is, Helen. It will make things confoundedly awkward. I shall have to go about giving endless explanations. Besides, here is Arthur's wife. I particularly don t want her to know."

"Why not? It is precisely that I was coming to. She seems to feel far more kindly to me than I should have supposed possible. I can't lie to her, Will. She has already asked me questions about my past life hard to answer. I want to tell her, so that we may have an honest basis for our friendship. I don't want to lose my hold on her."

"Nor on Arthur," acquiesced he gravely. "It is for that reason that I say you had better not tell her. I usually know what I am saying, do I not? I tell you it is for your own sake that I warn you to be quiet. Arthur isn't going to be held in the leash very long by that piece of china-ware piety, and it is to you he will naturally turn for sympathy. Don't spoil your chance of his friendship by breaking with her yet."

"Will," his wife said, with a glitter in her eyes he knew of old, "sometimes you talk like a very fiend incarnate."

"That," he replied rising, "is precisely what I am. There are a few rare, but fairly well authenticated cases on record, Helen, where a man under stress of circumstances, has been able to keep his own counsel; women without a confidant go mad. For your own sake you'd better trust me, now that Arthur isn't available; so I'll come and see you again. I am obliged to you for this jolly little supper. Your salads always were perfection. I'd like to stay and have you make me some coffee, but I have an engagement at twelve. Good-night."

XXI.

HIS PURE HEART'S TRUTH.

Two Gentlemen of Verona ; iv.—2.

WHEN Grant Herman attempted to speak with Mrs Greyson at the Fenton's reception, he had more in view than simply the desire of being near the woman he loved. He was full of trouble and bewilderment, and instinctively turned toward her for aid and sympathy.

The scene between himself and Helen, to which the latter had alluded in her conversation with Dr. Ashton, was of far deeper import than her words might have seemed to imply. In the first shock of discovering that her work was broken she had been so overcome, that although she struggled bravely to conceal her feelings, she had excited the sculptor's keenest pity; and it not unnaturally followed that in attempting to express his sympathy he found himself telling his love before he was aware. He had determined to be silent upon this subject. Uncertain what were Helen's feelings towards him and restrained by a sense of loyalty to the bond which united him to Ninitta, he had resolved to bury his love in his own breast, at least until time gave him opportu-

nity of honorably declaring it. Now circumstances betrayed him into an avowal of his passion; and he was not without the indignant feeling that Ninitta's act had freed him from all obligations to her. It might have required an ingenious casuist to arrive logically at the conclusion that an injury which the Italian had done to another released him from his plighted word, but the person injured was the woman he loved, and he blindly felt that Ninitta had struck at himself through his most sensitive feelings. He renounced all the fealty to which he had been held by a sense of honor, and he now poured out to Helen the full tide of his passionate love.

The sculptor was not a man to be lightly moved, but it is these calm, grave natures that once aroused are most irresistible. His passionate outburst took Helen unaware; she scarcely knew what she did, and she became suddenly aware of a truth so overwhelming that every thing else faded into insignificance beside it.

"I love you!" he cried out; and at the word she first knew, with a poignant pang of mingled bliss and anguish, that she too loved him.

It seemed to her that some power above her own volition ruled her, as in moments of high excitement the body sometimes appears to declare its independence of the will, and to act wholly by its own decisions. She was aware that she raised her eyes to his, although she would have given

much to avoid his glance; and she knew that it was from what he read there that he took courage to fold her in his embrace.

Yet with his arms about her and his piercing kisses upon her face, Helen felt as if sinking helplessly into a mighty ocean; as if all struggles must be unavailing, and she could only yield to the resistless love which engulfed her.

From this first feeling of powerlessness, however, her strong nature sprang with a sharp recoil. She was too noble to surrender without a struggle. She would not even think whether she loved this man; that might be considered upon some safe vantage ground; now all energy must be concentrated upon escaping from the deadly peril in which she found herself.

Helen had freed herself as far as she was able from the marriage bond which had so galled her, and she was glad to forget that such a tie had ever existed, but she yet remembered that she was still a wife, and the kiss of a man not her husband overwhelmed her with shuddering humiliation and fear. She struggled from her lover's embrace with such an expression of terror upon her face, that he started back amazed and grieved.

He began to stammer confused words of contrition, of sorrow, of love, and of supplication.

"How could you!" she gasped. "Oh, leave me!"

There came into her excited mind a way of es-

cape, upon which, even though it brought with it a sense of baseness, she seized in despair.

"Ninitta," she said. "Ninitta!"

He gave her a look of pain which went to her very heart. He did not move or answer, but his whole soul seemed to look through his dark eyes in pitiful appeal.

"Go," she continued, but in a hurried voice which betrayed her agitation. "Leave me now. Oh, I cannot bear it!"

And crushed with pain and shame, she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

Herman made a step towards her, but instantly she recovered herself, looking up with swimming eyes and lips that quivered despite her utmost effort.

"No," she said, "do not touch me. You must go. I cannot bear another word. Forgive me," she went on rapidly, as he hesitated, still with those appealing eyes fixed upon her. "Oh, forgive me, but go."

He turned slowly and moved towards the door. The broken bas-relief, with its beautiful mutilated figure caught his eye, and seemed again to remind him that he had at last a right to speak to Helen, unhampered by the thought of Ninitta. He looked back as if he would even now disobey her and plead his love anew. But her eyes refused his prayer before it could be uttered. He lingered still an instant.

"I cannot go," he broke out suddenly. "I love you! I must stay! I must at least have an answer. Do you think a man could kiss you once and then leave you like this?"

She shivered as if she felt anew his passionate embrace and shrank from it. She threw her glance about as to discover some means of escape. The gesture, the look, overwhelmed him with sudden remorse. He trusted himself not for a single backward look now, but rushed out of the studio, leaving her sitting there like the princess of the fairy tale who overcame the genii only by recourse to immortal fire which consumed her also.

Alone in his studio the sculptor strode up and down, struggling with the emotion which mastered him. He debated with himself whether Helen loved him or not; yet the more carefully he recalled his interview with her, the more impossible he found it to determine. But hope plucked courage out of this very uncertainty, and clung to the belief that had not Helen in her heart some affection for him, she could not have been so touched.

But what of Ninitta? He threw back his head and walked down the studio, his steps sounding sharply upon the hard cement floor. What of Ninitta? He had absurdly dallied with his supposed obligations to her long enough. Now, at least, after this outrage, he repeated to himself, he was free. He was at liberty now—if indeed he

had not always been—to consider what he owed to himself; what to the woman he loved.

He recalled the hot words he had spoken to the model earlier in the afternoon when the anger of discovery was fresh upon him, and he felt a pang of self-reproach. He could not but know how poignant to Ninitta must be the grief of giving him up, although he assured himself that in the long years of separation she must have become accustomed to live without him, and that her grief would be rather fancied than real. Yet he was too tender-hearted to be wholly at ease after all his reasoning. He at last started out to find Ninitta, perhaps to comfort her, perhaps to cast her off forever. At least to come to some definite conclusion of their doubtful relations.

But Ninitta was not to be found. She was not in her attic; nor did she return that night, nor the next day, nor yet the following; and it was to tell of the model's disappearance, and to ask aid in tracing her, that Herman had wished to speak to Helen at the Fenton's reception.

XXII.

UPON A CHURCH BENCH.

Much Ado about Nothing ; iii.—3.

HERMAN did not see Helen for several days after the reception, but she came down to the studio Sunday afternoon to begin the repairing of her mutilated bas-relief. The sculptor heard her step pass his door, and felt a thrill at the sound for which he had longingly waited every waking hour since he had heard Helen go out upon the night of Ninitta's disappearance.

He waited what seemed to him a long time, forcing himself to perform certain trifling things needful in the studio, yet Mrs. Greyson had only been able to get fairly to work before she heard his footstep, and then his tap upon her door.

He entered the studio almost hesitatingly, and after the usual greetings stood looking gravely at the disfigured clay.

"I began to think you were never coming to restore it," he remarked, breaking at last the silence.

"I could not bear to touch it," she returned, not caring to confess that she had also wished to avoid him until time should have restored his

usual self-control. "But I determined yesterday to begin this morning, only strangely enough I went to church for the first time since I came from Europe."

"Ah!" returned Herman smiling. "I often go to church when I am not too busy."

"I hardly supposed that a Pagan was guilty of going to any church where he could not worship Pasht."

"One can worship whatever deity he pleases in whatever temple, I suppose," was his rejoinder. "I'm catholic in my tastes. I do not so much mind what people worship, if they are only sincere about it."

"It must be a great comfort to believe every thing, if one only could."

"There is often danger," he observed, "that we assume it to be a weakness to believe any thing."

"It is, I'm afraid," replied she, turning her face from him and seemingly intent upon her modeling.

"At least we believe in work," Herman answered, "else we are not artists. You certainly find joy and support in your art."

"Yes," Helen said with a sigh; "but I fancy the joy of creation, great as it is, can never be so satisfying to a woman as to a man. It is humiliating to confess—or it is presumptuous to boast, I am not sure which—but a woman is never so

fully an artist as a man. He is in great moments all artist; but a woman is never able to lay herself aside even in her most imaginative moods."

"I cannot think you wholly right," her master returned smiling; "but to go back a little, at least faith is woman's peculiar province and prerogative. We seem nowadays to pride ourselves upon being superior to belief in any thing; but it is really a poor enough hypocrisy. If we really believed nothing, should we ever give up a single selfish desire or combat any impulse that seizes us. For my part, I am glad to find men better than their professions. But this," he added with his genial smile, "is more of a sermon, very likely, than you heard at church."

"I at least agree with it better than the one I heard at church this morning. The preacher patronized the Deity so that he shocked me."

"That troubles me at church," Herman assented; "preachers are so irreverent."

Helen stepped back to observe the effects of the work she was doing.

"Do you think," she ventured, "that it would be possible for me to induce Ninitta to pose again for the May? If I told her that I am not angry, that I understand, and that——"

"But Ninitta is gone!" exclaimed the sculptor, suddenly recalled to present difficulties. "I have not been able to find her since the day she did this."

"Gone!" echoed Helen in dismay; "and you cannot find her?"

Herman related in detail the steps he had taken to trace Ninitta, all of which had thus far proved unavailing. He had endeavored to avoid publicity, but he already began to fear that it would be necessary to call detectives to his aid.

"Not yet," Helen said. "Let me try first. Have you seen Mr. Fenton?"

"No; why? I have been very cautious. I have told nobody but Fred Rangely."

Helen reflected a moment. Her woman's instinct told her that it was not likely Ninitta would put any great distance between herself and the sculptor. The model could have but few acquaintances in the city, and as she would need support it seemed probable she might try posing for some of the artists. As this thought crossed her mind, Helen remembered that Ninitta had promised to pose for Fenton when no longer wanted for the bas-relief. It was therefore possible that Fenton might know something of the whereabouts of the missing girl; and in any case Helen had been so used to consulting the artist in any perplexity, that it was but natural for her thoughts to turn to him now.

"Let me try," she repeated. "It will be less likely to excite talk if I look for her; she was my model. Trust the search to me for a day or two."

He was only too glad to do so; glad to be re-

leased from the burden of anxiety, as by virtue of some subtle faith in Mrs. Greyson he was; glad of any thing in which he might obey her; glad above all of any bond of common interest which might draw them nearer to each other, even if it were search for the woman who stood between them.

On her way homeward Helen went into Studio Building, but before she had climbed half way to Fenton's room, she encountered Dr. Ashton.

"It is of no use," was his greeting. "He isn't in. His wife has probably taken him to church."

"He was at church this morning," Helen answered, putting her hand into the one Dr. Ashton extended. "I saw him."

"Did you go to church? What a lark."

"It was rather a lark," she assented; "only I got wretchedly blue before the service was done."

"What church was it? Mrs. Fenton looks as if she'd poise dizzily on high church altitudes like the angel on St. Angelo."

"So she does; she goes to the Nativity."

"How did Arthur look?"

"Amused at first; then bored; then cross; and finally, when the sermon was well under way, indignant."

"And his wife?"

"His wife, Will," Helen said with a sudden enthusiasm, "looked like a saint. She really believes all these fables. I wish I did."

"It will be some fun to watch Arthur's conver-

sion and backsliding," Dr. Ashton observed, "if he really gets far enough along to be able to backslide. Where are you going?"

"To see Arthur. I have an errand."

"Do you object to my walking with you?" he asked with a deference rare enough to attract her notice.

The sun was setting, and the trees on the Common, as yet showing but faintest signs of coming buds, stood out against the saffron sky. The long shadows stretched softly over the dull ground, while every slight prominence was gilded and transfigured by the golden glow which flooded from the west. The atmosphere had that peculiar brilliancy characteristic of the season, while the cool and bracing air was full of that champagne-like exhilaration in which lies at once the fascination and the fatality of the New England climate.

It was some time before either broke the silence.

"How I wish," at length began Helen wistfully.

"That shows," spoke her husband, as she left the sentence unfinished, "that you are still under forty. When you have quadrupled your decades you'll thank your stars for deliverances and ask for nothing more."

"When I get to that stage, then," she returned, "I'll take poison."

"Is that a hint?"

"Life is bad enough now," she continued with-

out heeding the interruption, "but better a bitter savor than none at all."

"You should devote yourself to cultivating the approval of conscience as I do. I only do what I think to be right, you know."

"But think right whatever you do."

"Not quite that," returned the Doctor with a laugh, "but the approval of my conscience—or of my reason, which stands in its place—is necessary to my happiness, so I change my principles whenever my acts don't accord with them."

"So do a great many persons," she responded; "perhaps most of us, for that matter, only we are seldom honest enough to own it."

"By the way," queried her companion, as they approached her destination, "how came Mrs. Fenton so quickly domesticated at the Church of the Nativity?"

"There is a young man there—a deacon or a monk; I never know these high church terms; they are usually faded out pieces of Romanism—that once wrote an article which enjoyed the honor of being interred in the *Princeton Review* when her uncle was one of its editors."

They reached the doorsteps and Dr. Ashton said good-by. Then he turned back.

"By the by," he said. "I walked up with you to make you invite me to supper again. I enjoyed the last time very much."

"Did you?" returned his wife, rather carelessly. "Come to-morrow—no, not until Thursday night.'

"Very well. I am to dine here then, and I'll come and give you an account of my visit."

XXIII.

HEART-SICK WITH THOUGHT.

Two Gentlemen of Verona ; i.—1.

THE Fentons were just going to dinner when Helen arrived, and she was persuaded to dine with them. She was not without some curiosity to observe her friend in his new relations, and she also found herself attracted by Edith, although the two women had apparently little in common.

The talk at dinner flowed on easily enough, Arthur conversing in the strain which of old Helen had been pleased to call "amiable," and which fretted her by being conventional and not wholly sincere. She liked the artist best when he spoke without restraint, even though she might not agree with his extravagances and often detected a trace of artificiality in his clever epigrams. It seemed to her that the whole tendency of Edith's influence upon her husband was towards restraint, yet she could not be sure whether the ultimate result upon Fenton's character might not be beneficial.

"It depends upon Arthur himself," Helen mused. "If he is strong enough to endure the

struggle of adapting his honest belief to her honest belief, he will be the better for it. I hope his love of ease will not make him evade the difficulty. It never used to occur to me how little I really know Arthur, so that I cannot tell how this will be."

When the host was enjoying his after dinner cigar, which by especial indulgence upon the part of Edith he was allowed to smoke in the parlor, Helen disclosed the object of her visit.

"Do you remember," she asked, "that model who posed for my May, and was to come to you next week?"

"Ninitta? Of course. What of her?"

"That is precisely what I wish to find out," she responded. "She has changed her address, and I thought it possible you might know something of her whereabouts."

"I have not seen her since the morning when she came into your studio. Doesn't Herman know?"

"The truth is," Helen said slowly, weighing her words with regard to their effect upon Edith, "that she has run away, and we do not know what has become of her. She went off in a rage, and I am troubled about her."

"Is she the Italian you spoke of, Arthur?" interrupted Mrs. Fenton in her soft voice. "What is she like?"

"Yes; a black-haired, splendidly shaped girl with piercing black eyes."

"I think I know where she is," Edith said quietly.

"You?" the others asked in one breath.

"You see," Mrs. Fenton explained, turning towards Helen, "I have made rather a plunge into charity work. Of course I meant to do something, but I hardly expected to begin quite so soon. But Mr. Candish is my rector, and he came for me yesterday to go to an Italian family that cannot speak English well. The children have just been put into our schools, but they have not advanced very far as yet. Their teacher asked Mr. Candish to do something for them; they are wretchedly poor. I wish you could see the place, Mrs. Greyson. Eight people in a room not so large as this, and such poverty as you could hardly imagine. Yet these people had taken in another. The mother goes about selling fruit, and she happened to speak to this girl that I think is Ninitta in her own language one night. The girl had been wandering about in the cold, not knowing where to go, and I suppose the sound of her own tongue touched her heart. Poor thing; she would not speak a word to me. How strange that I should chance to find her."

"Thank heaven she is safe," was Helen's inward exclamation. Aloud she said: "But what is she doing?"

"Nothing," Edith answered. "She seems to have had a little money, so that she can pay the

family something, and she has helped to take care of the children. They are Catholics, naturally, and not in Mr. Candish's parish; but they do not seem to have much religion of any kind, and keep clear of the priest for some reason."

"My wife will know more of the North End in a month," Arthur observed with an effort at good humor which did not wholly conceal from Helen a trace of annoyance, "than I should in six years. I wonder she can bear to go into such dirty places. Of course philanthropy is all very well, but I'd rather take it after it has been disinfected."

The bitterness in his tone jarred upon Helen. She felt a pang at his evident dissatisfaction with his wife's views, his want of harmony with his new surroundings.

"Arthur must be disciplined," Mrs. Fenton said, smiling fondly. "If he once learns that the secret of being happy lies in helping others, he'll be unselfish from mere selfishness, if from nothing else."

"Happy!" Helen exclaimed involuntarily. "Does one ever expect to be happy nowadays? Happiness went out of fashion with our grandmothers' bonnets."

"In this world," Edith answered, without any trace in her voice of the reproof which Helen half expected, "perhaps you are right. The age is too restless and skeptical for happiness here;

but that makes me long the more for it hereafter."

"But even in a future life," returned Helen, "I can hardly expect to be happy, since I shall still be myself."

"Happiness," was Mrs. Fenton's reply, "is a question of harmony with surroundings, is it not? And your surroundings in the other life may be such that you cannot but be happy."

"No more theology, please," interposed Arthur. "You forget, Edith, that I have been to church to-day, and too much piety at once might impair my spiritual digestion forever."

A perception that the flippancy of his tone shocked his wife, made Helen turn the conversation again to Ninitta, arranging to go with Mrs. Fenton in the morning to find the missing girl.

They fell into silence after this, the twilight deepening until only the glow of the fire lighted the room. Edith went to the piano and played a bit of Mozart, wandering off then into the hymn-tunes which she loved and which were familiar in all orthodox homes of the last generation: plaintive *Olmutz* and stately *Geneva*, aspiring *Amsterdam* and resonant *St. Martin's*, placid *Boylston* and grand *Hamburg*, *Nuremburg*, *Benevento*, *Turner* and *Old Hundred;* the tunes of our fathers, the melodies which embody the spirit of the old time New England Sabbath, a day heavy, con-

strained and narrow, it may be; but, too, a day calm, unworldly and pure.

Arthur's cigar was finished, and he had fallen into a deep reverie, looking into the coals. He recalled his conversations with Helen before his marriage. He wondered whether his acquiescence in the limitations of his present condition, his yielding to his wife's social and religious views, was an advance or a deterioration. These pious tunes jarred upon his mood, and he was glad when his wife left the instrument. His Bohemian instinct stirred within him, and taunted the ease-loving quality of his nature which put him in subjection to that which he believed no more now than in the days when he was the most sharp-spoken of the Pagans. A wave of disgust and self-loathing swept over him. He turned abruptly in the dusk toward Helen.

"Sing to us," he said. "Edith has never heard you."

But Helen had been moved by the melodies, which came to her as an echo from her childhood. She understood the half-peremptory accent in Arthur's voice to which she had so often yielded, but to which she would not now submit.

"No," she answered. "How can you ask me. My barbaric chant would be wholly out of keeping here. Some other time I shall be glad to sing for Mrs. Fenton; now I must go home."

XXIV.

IN PLACE AND IN ACCOUNT NOTHING.

1. Henry IV.; v.—1.

NOTWITHSTANDING her previous visit, Mrs. Fenton found it no easy matter to guide Helen to the place where Ninitta had taken refuge.

The poorer classes of foreigners in any city are led by similarity of language and occupations to gather into neighborhoods according to their nationality, and the Italians are especially clannish. The fruit-venders and organ-grinders form separate colonies, each distinguished by the peculiarities incident to the calling of its inhabitants, the crooked courts in the fruit-sellers' neighborhood being chiefly marked to outward observance by the number of two-wheeled hand-carts which, out of business hours, are crowded together there.

Ninitta was found in a room tolerably clean for that portion of the city, the old fruit woman who was its mistress having retained more of the tidiness of thrifty peasant ancestors than most of her class. One room was made to accommodate the mother and seven children, and during the absence of the former from home the premises were

left in charge of a girl just entering her teens, who, when Helen and Edith reached the place, was engaged in preparing the family dinner of maccaroni. The younger members of the family had just returned from school, and were noisily clamoring for their share, and all together relating the incidents of the day.

Upon a bed in one corner lay the object of their search, her face flushed, her hair disordered, her eyes wild and vacant. To all appearances she was in a high fever, and she took no heed of Edith, who approached the bed and spoke to her. At the sound of Mrs. Greyson's voice, however, the sick girl gave a cry and raised herself into a sitting posture.

"No, no!" she exclaimed in Italian, excitedly, "I will not! I will not!"

Helen drew off her gloves and sat down upon the dingy bed beside Ninitta, regarding her with pitying eyes.

"You shall not," she answered, in the girl's own language. "You need do nothing but what you choose."

The soft tone seemed to calm Ninitta. She allowed Helen to arrange the soiled and crumpled pillows, and yielded when her self-constituted nurse wished her to lie down again. The latter procured a bowl of water, and with her handkerchief bathed the sick girl's face, soothing her with womanly touches which waked in Edith a new

feeling of sympathy and tenderness. Mrs. Greyson's white fingers, contrasting strongly with the Italian's clear dark skin, smoothed the tangled hair from the hot forehead, and all the while her rich, pure voice murmured comforting words, of little meaning in themselves, perhaps, but sweet with the sympathy and womanhood which spoke through them.

Edith meanwhile was not idle. She applied herself to hushing the boisterous children, and to bringing something like quiet out of the tumult of the crowded room. She assisted the girl with her maccaroni, gravely listening to the principles which governed its equitable distribution, with her own hands giving the grimy little children the share belonging to each. An air of comfort seemed to come over the frowsy room after Edith had quietly set a chair straight here, picked up something from the floor there, and arranged the ragged shade at the window. Even the little Italians, half barbarians as they were, felt the change, and were more subdued.

Ninitta, too, was calmed and soothed, and, with Helen's cool hand upon her hot brow, she sank presently into a drowse.

"Mrs. Fenton," Helen whispered, fanning her sleeping patient, "Ninitta cannot remain here. I must take her home with me. I think she had better run the risk of being moved than to be ill in this crowded room."

"But," remonstrated Edith, somewhat aghast at this summary procedure, "you do not even know what is the matter with her."

"No," Helen returned lightly, "but I shall probably discover."

"Not by finding it something contagious, I hope," her friend said, laying her hand upon Mrs. Greyson's forehead with a slight, caressing touch.

"Can you get me a hack?" Helen asked of the girl who kept the house.

But the girl had no idea how to obtain one of those vehicles, which she had been accustomed to see driving about with a certain awe, but without the hope of ever being able to do more than admire them from a distance, unless, indeed, she should have the great good fortune of going to a funeral, when perhaps she might even ride in one, as did little Sally McMann of the next court, when her mother died. Mrs. Fenton therefore went herself for the carriage, finding remonstrance in vain to change her companion's decision.

During her absence Ninitta awakened, and, while seeming more rational, was less quiet than before. She repulsed her visitor with angry looks and muttered defiance. Knowing perfectly well the cause of the girl's agitation, Helen knew, also, that it was best to go directly to the root of the matter, and she did so unshrinkingly.

"You are wrong," she said in Ninitta's ear. "It

is you he loves. You are to go home with me because he wishes it."

At first the sick girl seemed to gather no meaning from these words, but as Helen repeated the assurance again and again, in different phrases and with Herman's name, she became passive, as if she at least caught the spirit if not the actual significance.

Mrs. Fenton had some difficulty in finding a carriage, and by the time she returned Ninitta had yielded herself submissively to Helen's guidance.

Mrs. Greyson saw that her charge was carefully protected against the cold, a matter which the mildness of the day rendered easy, and, supported by the two ladies, the model was able to walk down stairs to the carriage.

During the drive homeward Helen lay back thinking hotly, and flushed with excitement. Ninitta sank into a doze, and Mrs. Fenton sat looking at her friend with the air of one who has discovered in an acquaintance characteristics before wholly unsuspected. She hesitated a little, and then, mastering her shyness, she bent forward and kissed Helen's hand.

The other submitted in silence. Indeed, the exaltation of her mood seemed to lift her above her surroundings so that she felt a strange remoteness from her companion. Yet she was conscious of a vague twinge of annoyance at Edith's act, although she could neither have excused nor

defined the feeling. Mrs. Fenton not infrequently aroused in her a curious mingling of attraction and repulsion; and it was under the influence of the latter that she answered brusquely her friend's next remark.

"How did you quiet Ninitta?" Edith asked.

"By telling her lies," returned Helen wearily and laconically.

"What!"

"She is in no condition to be dealt with rationally," continued Mrs. Greyson, in a tone explanatory, but in no way defensive, "so I said whatever would soothe her."

Edith sat in silent dismay. Apparently the woman before her, by whose generous self-forgetfulness she had been touched, was perfectly untroubled by the idea of speaking a falsehood, a state of mind so utterly beyond Edith's experience as to be incomprehensible to her. She could not bring herself to remonstrate, but it pained her that such philanthropy should be stained by what she considered so wrong.

Mrs. Fenton was perhaps equally mistaken in her opinion of Helen's regard for truth and of her philanthropy. Mrs. Greyson had a deep repugnance to falsehood, and Arthur Fenton had often good-humoredly jeered at what he called her Puritanic scrupulousness in this respect. On an occasion such as at present, however, the use of an untruth would cause her not even a second thought,

her reason so strongly supporting her course as even to overcome her instincts; a fact which a moralist might deplore but which still remains a fact.

Her philanthropy, upon the other hand, although seeming to Edith so disinterested, was largely instigated by a desire to aid Grant Herman. Just what she wished or expected him to do, she could not have told, her actions being no more regulated by strict logic than those of most women; but she felt that it was the office of friendship to see, if possible, that no harm came to the Italian through the jealousy which both herself and Herman knew to be but too well founded. She determined to take Ninitta home and do for her all that was necessary, in order that the sculptor be spared the remorse which would pursue him if harm came to his old betrothed. She was not without a secret feeling, moreover, scarcely acknowledged to herself, that she owed some reparation to the girl whose lover's heart she had won, no matter how undesignedly.

Reaching home, she got Ninitta to bed and sent for Dr. Ashton. Then she dispatched a note to Grant Herman, saying:

"Ninitta is with me; give yourself no uneasiness."

XXV.

THIS DEED UNSHAPES ME.

Measure for Measure; iv.—4.

NINITTA'S illness proved after all very slight. So slight, indeed, that Dr. Ashton, calling in on his way to dine with the Fentons Thursday evening, found her gone. She had insisted upon returning to her attic, although Helen had not allowed her to depart without promising not to abscond a second time.

Ninitta was grateful to Mrs. Greyson with all the ardor of her passionate southern heart. She did not, it is true, understand the relations between Herman and Helen, but even her jealousy was lost in the gratitude she felt for the beautiful woman who had cared for her, and it is not unlikely saved her from a dangerous illness. It did not seem possible to the undisciplined Italian, versed only in crude, simple emotions, that a woman who was her rival could treat her with tenderness. She accepted Helen's kindness as indisputable proof that the latter did not love the sculptor, a conclusion which the premises scarcely warranted. She volunteered to pose again, and Mrs. Greyson, thinking it well to keep the girl

under her influence, and desiring a return to at least the semblance of the peaceful existence preceding the stormy episode just ended, eagerly accepted this offer, only stipulating that the model should undertake nothing until she was really well able.

"I shall come back to supper," Dr. Ashton said, as he left his wife. "I have half a mind not to go to Fenton's; only it amuses me to watch the fellow's degeneration."

"It never amuses me to watch any degradation," she returned gravely. "How do you know he is degenerating? If you mean by following his wife, why, they may be right after all, and what we call superstition the veriest truth."

"Of course," answered he. "I never pretended to administer the exclusive mysteries of truth; but it is always a degradation to yield to personal influence at the expense of conviction. Arthur is as much of a heathen to-day as he ever was, only he is too fond of comfort to have the courage of his opinions."

Helen sighed.

"Truth to me," she said thoughtfully, "is whatever one sincerely believes; I cannot conceive of any other standard. One man's truth is often another's falsehood."

"You are as dull as a preface to-night, Helen; what carking care is gnawing at your vitals?"

"Nothing in particular. A certain melancholy

is befitting a widow, you know, and that's what I am supposed to be."

"On the contrary there is a certain vivacity about the word widow to my mind."

"Your experience has been wider than mine. I am aware that I am too much given to vast moral reflections, but you provoke them."

"I am sorry to provoke you," he said gayly. "Forgive me before supper time; who knows what rich experiences I may have between now and then. Good-by."

As he walked toward his appointment, could Dr. Ashton's vision have reached to the house whither he was going, he would have seen Arthur Fenton and his wife sitting together before an open fire awaiting their guest. The artist was showing Edith a portfolio of sketches by foreign painters, which he had brought from his studio.

"What a strange uncanny thing this is," he remarked, holding one up. "It is just like Frontier; I never saw any thing more characteristic. I wonder you got so few of his tricks, Edith, while you studied with him."

"He always repelled me. I was afraid of him. Where did you get this sketch?"

"Dr. Ashton gave it to me."

"Dr. Ashton!"

"Yes; when he was in Paris, both he and his wife were intimate with Frontier. Or at least Will was."

"Oh, Arthur!"

She leaned forward in her chair, her always pale face assuming a new pallor. Laying her hand upon her husband's, she asked in a quick, excited manner:

"Do you know how Frontier died?"

"I know he died suddenly; now you speak of it, I have an idea it was a case of *felo de se*. You know I was in Munich at the time."

"Arthur," Edith said earnestly, "I have never told even you; but I saw Frontier die. I had a pass-key to his studio, and his private rooms were just behind it. That night I went in on my way from dinner—Uncle Peter and I had been dining together, and I left him at the door with the carriage—after a study I'd forgotten. We were going to Rome the next morning, and I didn't want to leave it. The picture was at the further end of the studio, and as I went down the room I heard voices and saw that Frontier's door was open. He sat at a table with a tiny wine-glass in his hand. A man who stood back to me said, just as I came within hearing: 'It is none of my affair, and I shall not interfere; but you'll allow me to advise you not to be rash.' I could not hear Frontier's answer, partly because I paid no attention, of course never suspecting the truth. But as I went towards my easel, Frontier, hearing the noise, I suppose, and afraid of being interrupted, caught up the glass and drank what was in

it. The other man sprang forward just in time to catch him as he fell back, and it suddenly came over me that he was taking poison. I cried out and ran into the room, but it seemed only an instant before it was all over. Oh, it was terrible, Arthur, terrible!"

She covered her agitated face with her hands, as if to shut out the vision which rose before her. Her husband sat in silent astonishment, a conviction growing in his mind of whom the other witness of Frontier's death must have been.

"Arthur," Edith broke out suddenly, "that man was no better than a murderer. He let Frontier kill himself. When I cried out, 'Oh, why didn't you stop him!' he said as coolly as if I had asked the most trivial question, 'Why should I? What right had I to interfere?' It was terrible! He seemed to me a perfect fiend!"

"It was—who was it?" demanded her husband, a name almost escaping him in his excitement.

"It was Dr. Ashton; the man who is coming to sit down at your table to-night. Arthur, I cannot meet him! I knew when he came to our reception that I had seen him before, but I could not tell where. There is his ring now. Let me get by you!"

"But where are you going?" Fenton asked in amazement.

"To my room. Any where to get out of his way."

"But what shall I tell him?"

"The truth; that I will not sit down to eat with a murderer."

She vanished from the room, leaving her husband alone. Dr. Ashton's step was already upon the stair, and however keenly Mrs. Fenton might feel the wickedness of the Doctor in not preventing Frontier's self-destruction, the action was too strictly in accord with Arthur's own views to allow of his condemning it. His friend found him in a state of confusion which instantly connected itself in the guest's mind with the non-appearance of Edith, an impression which was strengthened by the lameness of the excuses tendered for her absence. Dr. Ashton not unnaturally concluded that he had just escaped stumbling upon a family quarrel. He accepted whatever his host chose to say, and the two proceeded rather gloomily to dinner.

In Arthur's mind there sprang an irritation against both his wife and his friend. His instincts were all protective, that term including comfort as well as self-preservation. He was intensely annoyed at his wife's attitude, and began to vent his spleen in cynical speeches, which since his marriage had been rare with him.

"Christian grace," he declared, "is exactly like milk; excellent and nourishing while it is fresh, but hard to get pure, and even then sure to sour."

"Say something more original if you are cross,

Arthur," observed his friend good humoredly. "What is the matter? Is it a new rug or a Japanese bronze you are dying for?"

"Hang rugs and bronzes," retorted Arthur, with a vicious determination to be ill-natured. "If I can get the necessities of life, I am lucky."

"Nonsense," was the reply. "It isn't that. The lack of the necessities of life makes a man sad; it is the lack of luxuries that makes him cynical."

Dr. Ashton was perfectly right in his inward comment that Fenton was secretly regretting his marriage. This was the thought that filled Arthur's mind. It was true he had had no absolute disagreement with his wife, although it is not impossible that it might have come to this, had a delay in the guest's arrival allowed time. But it filled the husband with an unreasoning rage that Edith presumed to establish so strict a code of morals. He felt that her position as his wife demanded more conformity to his standards. Why need she trouble herself about that which did not concern her, and sit in such lofty judgment upon the morals of her neighbors? Did she propose keeping Dr. Ashton's conscience as well as her own—and his? Certainly those whom the husband found worthy his friendship it ill became the wife to stigmatize and avoid. He sat moodily tearing his fish in pieces instead of eating; for the moment wholly forgetting his duty as host.

"If you'll pardon my mentioning it," Dr. Ashton said at length, "you are about as cheerful company as a death's head. You are so melancholy that I am tempted to fling in your face one of my old epigrams; that love is a gay young bachelor who can never be persuaded to marry and settle down."

The other laughed and made an effort to shake off his gloom; but with so little success that his guest resolved to escape at the earliest moment possible. Something in Fenton's forced talk, however, attracted Dr. Ashton's attention.

"My wife was a pupil of Frontier."

The simple phrase, which had escaped Arthur's lips because it had been in his mind not to allude to this fact, might have gone unnoticed had not the speaker himself so strongly felt the shock of disclosure as to show sudden confusion. The whole matter was at once clear to Dr. Ashton, who having recognized Edith at the reception, had been prepared for identification in his own turn.

"So that," he observed calmly, "is the reason Mrs. Fenton does not dine with us to-night. I knew she was sure to recognize me sooner or later; but as I had no motive for concealing this matter, on the other hand I had no reason for recalling so unpleasant a circumstance to her mind."

There was a pause of a moment, and then the Doctor continued:

"I think Frontier was rather foolish. I told him so. A charming little Hungarian girl of whom he was fond, had left him to follow the fortunes of a Polish Count, or something of the sort. I do not see why a man should kill himself for so trifling a thing as a woman; but if he chose to, I am not one of those officious persons who feel justified in interfering with any private act they don't happen to approve. I certainly should resent such impertinent intrusion into my own affairs."

"And I," assented Arthur doggedly; "but my wife ——"

"Certainly; I understand. Mrs. Fenton says hard things of me because I would not rob poor Frontier of what little comfort he could get from dying. Very well; I will not offend her by my presence. Only she is setting herself a hard task in attempting to treat people according to their conservatism. In these days the sheep and goats have come to be so much alike in appearance, that I scarcely see how a mere mortal is to distinguish between them. My own case I settle for her by avoiding her house."

"But this is my house," protested Arthur, intensely chagrined.

"No," his guest replied, still smiling and moving toward the door. "It is the nest you have built for your love and your—regeneration! Good night."

XXVI.

THERE BEGINS CONFUSION.

1 Henry VI. ; iv.—1.

ALONE in her own room, Edith relieved her overwrought feelings by a burst of tears, brief, indeed, but bitter. Like her husband, she felt that this incident, although not assuming the guise of a quarrel, was an opening wedge in the unity of their affection. Unlike Arthur, however, she thought of it with self-reproach and misgiving. She did not for an instant consider the possibility of having taken a different position in regard to Dr. Ashton, yet in a womanly, illogical way, she felt that she should have learned her husband's wishes before so vehemently declaring her own views.

She heard the artist and his guest go in to dinner, and the thought flashed upon her that this was the first time her husband had dined without her since their marriage. She wondered if he remembered it, and, remembering, regretted. She longed for companionship, for some friend into whose sympathetic ear she could pour her story, from whom she might ask advice. She reflected sadly how far she was removed from her intimate

friends. Of her new acquaintances many had been most kind to her, but towards none of them, not even to her relatives, had she been so strongly drawn as to wish now to go to them for confidence and sympathy; unless, came a second thought, it were Mrs. Greyson. She was a widow, Edith reflected, and had evidently suffered much, while the strength of her character was evident from her dealing with the Italian girl. It would be no disloyalty to go to her; there had been no words spoken between husband and wife which could not be told a friend, and Edith felt that she needed the advice of a woman more versed in the intricacies of life than herself.

She dressed herself for walking, and slipped noiselessly out of the house.

Mrs. Greyson was at dinner, and was naturally surprised at seeing her caller, but she had both too much tact and too much breeding to ask explanations.

"I do hope you have not dined," she said. "I am so much alone that it is a perfect delight to me to have company. My dinner is a little like a picnic, but if you will only consider how great a favor you are doing me by sharing it, the consciousness of philanthropy ought to make it palatable."

Neither lady mentioned Arthur, although his name was uppermost in the thoughts of both. They sat down together in Helen's tiny dining-

room, and served by her only maid, had a charming meal. The hostess exerted herself to entertain her guest, wisely judging that what Edith said in calmness she would be far less likely to regret than words uttered in the unguarded moments of her excitement. She told Mrs. Fenton stories of her studio life both in Boston and abroad, she led Edith on to speak of her own travels and experiences, until the latter almost forgot that she was dining in one house and her husband in another. It was not until the coffee was reached, coffee made as only Helen could make it, that the subject of the visit was really broached.

"How is Mr. Fenton?" Helen asked deliberately, believing the time had come for such a question.

The face of the other fell. She experienced a pang at the consciousness of having been gay and happy, forgetful of her husband and her trouble.

"He is well," she answered falteringly.

"Why did you not bring him with you?" continued Mrs. Greyson lightly, yet with a secret determination to know the cause of her guest's evident disturbance.

"He did not know I was coming," Edith responded in a low voice. "That is what I came to talk about. I thought you might understand; but it involves a third person, and perhaps I ought not to tell you. I am sure, though," she went on, gaining confidence now that the ice was broken,

"that I can trust you. A friend of Arthur's came to dine to-night, and just as the door-bell rang, I found him to be the man I once saw commit murder in Paris."

"Murder!" exclaimed Helen, turning white. "Commit murder?"

"Consent to it," corrected Edith, unconsciously a little pleased to have produced so great an effect upon her usually self-possessed friend. "He looked on while Frontier took poison, without trying to prevent him."

"But that," Mrs. Greyson said slowly, "is hardly the same thing as murder."

"It is quite as bad," Edith protested earnestly. "It makes me shudder to think of his dining alone with Arthur at this moment. Who knows what might happen!"

"Nothing tragic, I think," Helen replied smiling. "He does not go about with pistols in his belt, I suppose."

"It is awful to me," Edith continued, with increasing excitement, too much stirred to notice the sarcasm. "I told Arthur I could not sit down with a murderer, and just at that moment we heard his step, and I ran away up stairs; and then I felt dreadfully, and I came to you."

"I thank you for your confidence. But what do you mean to do? What will Arthur tell him?"

"The truth, I hope."

"He is scarcely likely to say to the guest he has

himself invited that you think him a murderer," answered her friend, smiling again, "and I am not sure that he would even look at this quite so severely as you do."

"How else can he look at it?" demanded Edith. "How else can any one look at it? Isn't it murder to take human life, and if one does not prevent suicide when he might, isn't it the same as if he did it himself?"

"We will not get into a discussion," Helen replied gently. "I feel about it as you do; though I believe very differently. But I see perfectly well how a man might be strictly honest in thinking that it was the privilege of any human being to lay aside his life when he is weary of it; and I do not presume to condemn others for feeling what I only think I believe."

"Think you believe!" cried the other in horror. "You do not think you believe that murder is right?"

"Assuredly not; but as there are so many related points upon which we do not agree, would it not be better to talk of this particular case than of general belief?"

"But it is impossible for any one to believe as you say," persisted Edith; "simply impossible. No one can believe that wrong is right."

"But each has his own standard."

Against this Edith protested, but Helen returned no answer. She regretted being involved in

such a debate, and resolved to let the discussion go no further. They sat in silence a moment, and then Edith again spoke.

"I do not know what to do," she said. "Of course Arthur cannot know that man any longer. You were in Paris at the time Frontier died, were you not? Did you ever know ——"

She broke off suddenly, remembering that she had not intended disclosing the name of her guest.

"Dr. Ashton?" Helen returned, fixing her eyes upon her companion, and unconsciously speaking with a deliberation which gave especial weight to her words. "Yes; I know him. We went to Paris together."

"Together! Was he a friend of your husband? How did you know whom I meant?"

There was no perceptible pause before Helen answered; but meanwhile she determined to throw aside all concealment. She could no longer stand before Arthur Fenton's wife with the humiliation of even a tacit deception between them. She felt a spirit of defiance rising within her. Who was this woman that she assumed the right to judge them all by standards for whose narrowness only contempt was possible! At least she would rise above all conventional prejudices, and no longer tacitly ask, as by silence she had done, exemption from the harsh judgments of Mrs. Fenton's creed.

Helen was too womanly not to shrink from this

disclosure, and she had been too thoroughly educated in the faith by which Edith lived not to understand just how her life would appear seen through the latter's belief. Disconnected with a question relating to the marriage relation and by implication casting reflection upon her delicacy and even purity of life as a woman separated from her lawful husband, Helen could have met with dispassionate reasoning whatever assault Edith made upon her. This point was too vital, it touched too closely the core of her woman's nature, and although she retained perfectly her self-control, there was a pulse of passion in her voice when she spoke.

"Dr. Ashton," she said unflinchingly, "is my husband."

"What?" cried Edith.

"We have not found it convenient to live together," Helen continued, with increasing calmness, a faint tinge of contempt creeping into her voice, "and so since my return from Europe I have taken my mother's name to avoid gossip. Dr. Ashton and I are very good friends still."

"And did Mr. Fenton know this?" asked the other, very pale.

"Certainly; although you understand that it is not a matter which we discuss with the world at large. I pass, I believe, as a widow; though I have never done or said any thing to give color to that idea."

It is doubtful if Helen fully comprehended the effect of these words upon her guest. Every fiber of Edith's being tingled. All her most sacred principles seemed outraged. She in some remote way felt, moreover, as if to hear without protest so lax notions of the responsibilities of marriage was to stain her womanhood and dim the luster of her modesty.

"How dared he introduce you to me?" she cried. "You are the wife of a murderer and you defend his crime; you pretend to be a widow, you ignore your marriage——"

"Stop," the hostess said with dignity. "We need not go over the ground. Mr. Fenton made us acquainted, I presume, because he agrees with me in seeing nothing wrong in my position, however unconventional it may be. You will see that if I had been ashamed of the fact I could easily have kept it from your knowledge."

But Edith made her no answer. She was too much overwhelmed by the various emotions which the disclosure of the evening had aroused.

Edith was, from Helen's point of view, fatally narrow, it is true; but the latter might have reflected that the limitations of her friend's vision were the faiths of the Christian world, and that her tenacity arose not from obstinacy but sincerity. It is an age when belief and doubt are brought face to face so sharply that the shock disturbs by its jar the most ordinary affairs of life.

Edith was pure, high minded, simple souled, and for the rest she was honest and earnest. Her creeds were vitalized by the warm fervor with which she clung to them, and what more could be demanded of her?

She quitted the dining-room, and soon Helen heard the outer door close behind her. The night gathered, and the lonely woman left behind sat long in sad reverie, until the door was again opened to admit Dr. Ashton.

XXVII.

WEIGHING DELIGHT AND DOLE.

Hamlet; i.—2.

DR. ASHTON came in too full of his own interview with Arthur to notice particularly if his wife showed signs of agitation.

"My dear," he said, throwing himself into a chair, "it is at once one of the latest and the wisest of my reflections that you had better consider a newly married man as an entire stranger and form his acquaintance quite from the foundation, wholly unbiased by any notion you had of him as a bachelor."

"His wife," responded Helen quietly, "has been dining with me, so I understand something of the situation. But how did Arthur behave?"

"Like any husband who does not care to quarrel with his wife even when he disapproves of her. It is upon that principle that matrimonial felicity depends. Do you say Mrs. Fenton has been here?"

"Yes; she came to me for sympathy and I administered it by telling her that I am your wife."

"The devil! I beg your pardon; but, Helen, it was precisely because I knew she was sure

remember this Frontier scrape that I wanted her not to know. She will be very hard on you."

"Christianity is always hard," returned she; "but what difference does it make; it was only a question of time. She is sweet and pure and good, Will, but her religion holds her in bands stronger than steel. I couldn't long keep step with one in chains. It might as well come now as any time."

Her husband looked at her with evident interest not unmixed with admiration.

"She provokes me to do and to say childish things," Helen continued, "just to shock her. I told her bluntly the other day that I had been telling a falsehood, and she had the impertinence to look shocked. I am not sure that I did not go so far as to say I 'lied,' a word that hardly holds the place in English that it did in the good days of Mrs. Opie. She would have been reconciled if I had said I told what I hoped was true."

"I should have told her," laughed Dr. Ashton, "that I only used truth as the Egyptians used straw in bricks, the smallest possible quantity that will hold the rest together."

"I cannot see why Arthur married her," Helen said musingly.

"Oh, as to that, an idle man will fall in love with any pretty woman who will snub him."

"But Arthur isn't idle, and she doesn't snub him."

"Very well; he married her because he fell in love for no reason but the weakness of our sex."

"Love seems generally to be regarded by the masculine mind in the light of a weakness."

"Isn't it?" her husband returned. "Love is the condition of desiring the impossible, and if that is not a weakness, what becomes of logic?"

"I am tired of logic," she said, rising abruptly. "I am tired of every thing. Let us have supper. I want a glass of wine. I am sure I tried to be kind to Mrs. Fenton. I would have helped her if I could; but how could I assist her unless she chose to let me, and that, too, knowing who I am."

"I never knew you to be other than kind," was the grave reply, which brought to Helen's cheek a faint flush of pleasure.

The servant came in with supper, and the slender glasses were filled with Rhine wine.

"I could not help thinking," Dr. Ashton said, lifting his glass,—"I drink to your very good health, my dear—I could not help thinking of my wedding gift to Arthur, that he asked me for it, I mean."

"I thought of it, too, when his wife told me the story. It is well she does not know that of you."

"Oh, it wouldn't matter," he said carelessly. "She couldn't feel a greater horror of me than she does already. Do you see the mark of Cain on my forehead, Helen?"

"Isn't it droll," she returned, with a smile half

pensive, half humorous, "to feel ourselves suddenly tried by new standards and found so wanting. I am not sure but dramatic propriety demands that I should poison Mrs. Fenton. I have that vial, you know."

"Did you notice the inscription on the vial?"

"No; is there one?"

"See for yourself," he answered, refilling his glass.

She rose from the table and brought from a small cabinet the morocco case, unopened since Arthur had given it to her. A certain dread and distaste had prevented her examining it. Now she sat down again in her place, a beautiful woman, with the light falling upon her from above, shining upon her golden hair, and bringing out the hues of her sea-blue dress. Her husband watched her as she held the case a moment in her delicate, firm fingers before unclasping it. He had learned within these last weeks that his old love for Helen had re-awakened; or more truly that a new affection had been born. The knowledge had come to him through thinking upon the relations between Helen and Arthur and in speculating concerning her feeling for Grant Herman, and it had been in his mind when he described love as the desire for the impossible. He had determined to speak his passion, but as he looked at his wife sitting within arm's length yet as remote as if half the world lay between them, he hesitated.

Helen unclasped the case and lifted the tiny cut-glass vial from its velvet bed.

"How extravagant you were in your vial," she said, involuntarily lifting it to her nostrils.

"Don't!" Dr. Ashton exclaimed, leaning forward suddenly.

"Is it so deadly as that!" she asked in some dismay, holding it off.

"It is simply pure prussic acid," he replied. "But it might be loosely stopped."

She examined carefully the minute writing engraved upon the glass.

"'Death foils the gods,'" she read. "Is it one of your own wickednesses, Will?"

"I don't know. By the way, we might send it to Mrs. Fenton now as a souvenir of the two desirable acquaintances she has lost."

"What a brood of vipers she must think us, Will. I think it is pathetic, probably; but I cannot help being amused. It is rather an odd sensation to find that instead of being the harmless, insignificant body I have always supposed, I am really a hardened and abandoned reprobate."

"Oh, I've always known it, but I did not tell you for fear of destroying your peace of mind."

"I'm afraid," sighed Helen, rather absently, "that—if you don't mind the slang—Arthur has an elephant on his hands."

"Yes," assented the other, "himself."

She laughed musically, toying with the little cut-glass vial.

"How familiarity takes away the dread of any thing," she remarked. "We become accustomed to any thing; and, while I dare say it is the shallowest of sophistry, that ought to be an argument in favor of the theory that vice and fearfulness are alike only strangeness."

"That is rather a sophistical bit of logic; so perfectly so that it ought to be theology. Excuse me, but could you let me have a morsel of cheese."

"There does not seem to be any for you to have," she said, glancing over the table.

"Isn't there," returned he, as carelessly as if he had not noted that fact. "It is of no consequence."

"Oh, I can easily get it; I suppose Hannah forgot it."

She restored the vial to its place, laying the closed case by her plate, and left the room. The instant the door closed behind her, Dr. Ashton reached across the table, possessed himself of the vial, returning the case to its former position. His wife turned just outside the door, and came back with a meaning smile to take up the empty case and lock it again in the cabinet.

"I cannot trust you," she remarked with a smile; "you are too eager to foil the gods."

He smiled in return, holding his wine-glass up to the light.

"There is more where that came from," he said. "You forget my profession."

"Of what are you musing so intently?" Helen queried, half an hour later, while, the supper being ended, her husband was enjoying his cigar.

"Of two things which I have to communicate. One is a folly and the other—or perhaps I should say each—is a misfortune."

"The folly," returned she, "I forgive; the misfortune I regret. What are they?"

"I am glad you forgive the folly. That gives me boldness to tell it. I have fallen in love."

"You, Will! With whom?"

"That is the madness of it. With my wife."

"Will!"

"It is the truth," he went on, half whimsically, but with a certain ring of earnestness in his tone. "I acknowledge the madness, the poor taste of a man's falling in love with his own wife, but the fact stubbornly remains. I have been in love with you for a long time, but I stood back for Arthur like a good fellow."

"I never was in love with Arthur," she interrupted.

"It is no matter," he continued. "The question is, can't you get up a grain of grace for me, old lady?"

He leaned over the table, his dark eyes shining as she had never seen them before. She was fascinated by his gaze; she felt as if the ground were

slipping from beneath her feet, and as though he were casting upon her an evil spell. A wave of despair swept over her. Must she again submit to his power; were the old days of bitter bondage to return; was she nothing but a puppet to his will?

In this extremity a memory saved her. Unable to withdraw her gaze from her husband's face, there came to her suddenly the look in the eyes of Grant Herman that day when he told her his love. The blood surged to her cheeks, but her calmness returned.

"It is of no use, Will," she said with gentle firmness. "All that is past forever between us. We had better not speak of it," she added wistfully. "I have so few friends that I cannot bear to lose any one of them."

"My folly is then my misfortune," he responded, with no appearance of diminished good humor. "It is the pleasure of the gods to torment me; I suppose it amuses them. The old Romans were only aping them in their blood-thirsty sports, and I fancy that is the secret of their deification, for nothing seems so much to the liking of the gods as to torment humanity."

The evident endeavor which the speaker made to appear flippant and at his ease showed her how deeply he was moved. His wife felt this without fully reasoning it out, and the consciousness that this self-controlled man was so stirred awoke

in her a strange and powerful excitement. She turned a shade paler, as she looked silently down into her wine-glass. Her own life had been too sad for her not to feel some emotion at his words. She strove to repress the thoughts which made her bosom swell and heave, yet it was from them her words came when she broke the silence.

"It is bitterest to find one's self mistaken. To find that our gods are only clay like the rest of humanity. I could forgive a friend for neglect, abuse or any cruelty; but I could never forgive him for falling below my ideal of him."

"You do not mean me," he returned placidly, "for of me you never had an ideal; but waiving that for a moment, I should like to tell you of my second misfortune—if it isn't to be reckoned a blessing."

She looked at him without speaking. If this disclosure were but a repetition in varied form of the other, she had no wish to help him put it into words. Yet even as this thought passed through her mind, she fancied she had detected in his tone some new gravity.

"I've discovered," continued Dr. Ashton, with the same light manner he had used throughout the interview, "that I have a cancer gayly but with grim persistency developing under my arm."

"Oh, Will," Helen cried, clasping her hands, "you are not in earnest!"

"I assure you it is a very earnest matter with me, and has been for some time. I might have an operation, I suppose, if it were worth while; though it is so near the heart that it would be uncomfortably risky."

Helen became suddenly calm. The color faded slowly from her cheeks, and her husband, watching her narrowly, saw her beautiful lips assume a new expression of firmness and determination. She unconsciously lifted her head into a more erect carriage. Her eyes were moist and full of feeling. Slowly in her mind formed a resolve, and with a full knowledge of the renunciation of self which it involved, she called up all the nobility of her soul to aid her in living up to it. Creeds were little to this woman, yet her life was formed upon the principles which give to creeds their stability, and by which the moral is removed from the animal.

"Will," she at length said, slowly and gravely, "could it not be arranged for me to live with you? You did not tell me you were fond of me without having thought out the possibilities."

"I should have hesitated to ask so much," was his reply, "even of your love; I shall certainly not take it of your pity."

"My pity?" she murmured, not raising her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"You know. You cannot think me so dull as not to see that your proffer comes not from affec-

tion, but from generosity. I thank you, but I will accept no sacrifices."

He rose as he spoke, and put out his hand.

"I must be going," he said in an indifferent tone. "I have letters to write that must be mailed by midnight. I am not more than half as bad, Helen, as you have always persisted in thinking. I never made very profound pretensions, but I've treated every body squarely from my own point of view. If they have regarded my blessings as curses, it wasn't my fault, and I am not sufficiently hypocritical to pretend that I think it was. Good night."

He gave her hand a warmer and more lingering pressure than usual.

"I've had a very pleasant evening," he added, "despite the admixture of truth. Young people don't like any bitters, but we old, shattered wrecks need a dash of it in the wine of life to help digestion. Good night."

XXVIII.

LIKE COVERED FIRE.

Much Ado about Nothing; iii.—1.

THAT night marked an epoch in the married life of Arthur and Edith Fenton.

The results of matrimony upon character are for the most part slow and hardly perceptible, yet even so not without certain well-defined stages by which their progression forces itself into recognition; and in fervid temperaments like that of the artist, any change is sure to be rapid, and marked by sharp and sudden crises.

Edith returned from Helen with her soul in a tumult. Grant Herman had described more than her face when he applied to her the epithet nun-like. It was a source of perpetual wonderment to many of her friends that such a girl could be so strongly attracted by Arthur Fenton; but those who knew his marvelous flexibility, the unconscious hypocrisy with which he adapted himself to any nature with which he came in contact, and on the other hand his fascinating manner, at once brilliant and sympathetic, felt Edith's love to be the perfectly natural consequence. She believed him to be what she wished, and he, without con-

scious deceit, became for the time being what she believed him to be.

It was a theory of Dr. Ashton's that what Arthur Fenton became was so purely a question of environment as to leave the artist all but irresponsible. This fatalistic view he had laid before his wife with some detail, at once explaining and defending his position.

"If a chameleon is put upon a black tree," he said on one occasion when the matter was under discussion, "you have really no right to blame him for becoming black too; it is simply his nature. If Arthur is like that it isn't his fault. He wasn't consulted, I fancy, about how he should be made at all. He is self-indulgent, and if a point hurts him he glides away from it. He cannot help it."

"There is something in what you say," Helen had reluctantly assented, "but I think you put it far too strongly."

"Oh, very likely," was the careless reply. "His strongest instinct, though, is to escape pain. We are none of us better than our instincts."

To such a decision as this, had she heard it, Edith, too religious to acknowledge any thing tending towards fatalism, would not for a moment have agreed; yet it embodied a truth destined to cause her deepest sorrow, and which was gradually forcing itself upon her. Already, although they had been married so few weeks,

even her love-blinded eyes could not but perceive much in her husband which shocked and pained her. She had not considered deeply enough, never having had the experience which would have taught her the need of considering, how great was the gulf between her moral standpoint and that of her betrothed. He had seemed so yielding that she had failed to perceive that his compliances were merely outward, and left his mental attitude unchanged. Now when it became necessary, as in every wedded life it must sooner or later, for her to appeal to his ultimate moral belief, she was startled to find nothing with which she was in sympathy. A cynic—or, indeed, her husband himself—would have assured her that it was, after all, a question of standards merely, and that difference of judgment was natural and inevitable, and that measured by his own convictions Arthur was quite well enough. Her answer to such a proposition would have been that there was but one standard, and that what differed from that were not moral principles at all, but excuses for immoral obliquity.

Outwardly, it is true, there was little in her husband's life of which Edith could complain. He accompanied her to church, and if he quizzed the preacher after returning home, she was ready to excuse this as the natural result of a keen appreciation of the ludicrous. He allowed her to do as she chose in the matter of charity work, and he

even refrained from going to his studio on Sunday, a sacrifice whose magnitude she had no means of estimating, and which she therefore thought would be continuous. It was when some ethical question arose between them that Edith was disquieted, feeling sometimes as if she were looking into black deeps of immorality. The principles which to her were most sacred, were to him light subjects upon which, she was well aware, only her presence prevented his jesting. The most obvious laws of rectitude were but thistle-down before the whirlwind of his subversive theories; and Edith found argument impossible with one who denied her every premise.

His old acquaintances found in Arthur Fenton a change more subtle but none the less distasteful. It was a trait of his nature to assume the character he was half unconsciously acting, as a player may between the scenes still feel the personality he is simulating upon the stage; and there was about Fenton when he came in contact with the Pagans, a vague air of remonstrance and disapproval, even when he was as bold as ever in his own cynical utterances.

"An expression of virtuous indignation isn't becoming in you, Fenton," Rangely said to him one day. "Especially in a discussion which you started yourself by the most shocking piece of wickedness I ever heard."

And among all the Pagans there existed a yet

unspoken feeling that Fenton was ceasing to be one of them.

On returning from Helen's, Edith found her husband still engaged with Dr. Ashton, but as soon as the latter had gone Arthur came to her room.

"Well," he said, sinking leisurely into a chair. "Do you feel any milder? Have you had your dinner?"

"Yes," she returned, not leaving her seat on the opposite side of the room. "I have been dining with Mrs. Ashton."

"What!" cried Arthur, as if a bomb had exploded at his feet. Then he sank back into his languid position. "So she has told you," he remarked carelessly.

"Yes, she has told me. Did you know, Arthur, when you brought us together, that she was living under a false name, and under false pretenses?"

"I knew certainly," replied her husband with a coolness that marked his inward irritation, "that her legal name was Ashton. I have still to learn that she is living under false pretenses."

"Is it not false," retorted Edith, with difficulty controlling her voice, her indignation increasing with every word, "to pass as widow, to live separated from her husband?"

"Oh, false? Why, in your stiff, conventional definition of the word that calls the letter every thing, the spirit nothing, I dare say it is false; but

what of that? She has a right to do as she pleases, has she not?"

Edith drew herself back in her chair and looked at him across the dimly lighted chamber. It is but justice to her husband to consider that he could not dream of the anguish she suffered. It was, as he so often said, a question of standards. By his, she was narrow, uncharitable, even bigoted; tried by the code of more orthodox circles she was simply high-minded, true and noble in her devotion to principle. She was neither bigoted nor prudish, however the alien circumstances in which she was placed made her appear so. To her it was a vital question of right and purity of which Arthur disposed with such contemptuous lightness. True as the sunlight herself, no pang could be more bitter than the knowledge that the truth was not sacred to the man she loved. Her husband's words pierced her like a dagger. It was some minutes before she answered him. He rose moodily, lit a cigar at the gas jet and sat down again before she broke the silence.

"Arthur," she said in a voice which was sad and full of the solemnity of deep feeling, "have you no regard for truth?"

"Truth!" retorted he. "To go back to Pilate's conundrum, 'What is truth?' If you mean a strict and fantastic adherence to facts and to stiff conventional rules, no, I haven't the slightest regard for truth. If you mean the eternal verities

as a man's own nature and the occasion interpret them, yes, I have the highest."

"But that is only a confusion of words, Arthur. What do you mean by 'eternal verities' if not adherence to facts? The eternal verities cannot be whatever it pleases any one to say. Doesn't all human intercourse depend upon faith in one another that we will adhere to facts? Even if you do not look at the right and the wrong, there are surely reasons enough why the truth should be sacred."

Her husband whiffed his cigar, idly blowing a succession of graceful rings.

"You are quite a metaphysician. Did you have a pleasant dinner?"

"But, Arthur," Edith persisted, ignoring his attempt to break away, according to his habit, from a discussion which did not please him, "but, Arthur, do you think it right for Mrs. Greyson—Mrs. Ashton, I mean, to live so?"

"Right? Oh, that is the same old question in another shape. Mr. Candish will answer all those theological riddles; it is his business to. They don't interest me."

He threw away his half smoked cigar, dusted his coat sleeve of a stray fleck of ash, settled his cravat before the glass, and humming a tune walked towards his wife, his hands clasped behind him.

"We do not agree, Edith," he said with cold

deliberation," and unless you broaden your views, I am afraid we never shall. You are a dozen decades behind the day, and are foolish enough to take all your church teaches you in earnest. Religion should no more be taken without salt than radishes. The church inculcates it to excuse its own existence, but you certainly are reasonable enough to outgrow this old-fashioned Puritanism."

"Arthur," was her answer, "we do not agree, and if you wait for me to come to your standards, I am afraid you are right in saying that we never shall; and, indeed, I hope you are right. It makes me more unhappy than you can think," she continued, her eyes swimming with bitter tears, "that we are so far apart on what I must believe to be vital points; on truths which I believe, Arthur, with my whole soul—as you would, too, had you not carefully educated yourself into a doubt which cannot make you better or happier."

She had risen as she spoke, and stood facing him, her pure, pale face confronting his with a look of pathos which touched him despite himself. She came a step nearer, and put her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Arthur!" she pleaded, "I love you, and how can I help mourning that you wrong your better nature; that you resist the impulses of your own best self?"

He yielded to her caresses in silence. He remembered that Helen had used this same phrase.

"Women always appeal to one's best self," he commented inly, with a mental shrug, "which means a man's inclination to do whatever a woman asks of him."

But he kissed his wife's lips, and said, tolerantly:

"We will talk it over some other time, my dear. We are both tired to-night. But you are right, I suppose, as you always are."

And she loosened her arms from his neck, recognizing that he had put her appeal aside and waived the whole matter.

XXIX.

A NECESSARY EVIL.

Julius Cæsar ; ii.—2.

AT the St. Filipe Club, somewhere in the small hours of that same night, half-a-dozen members were lingering. One was at the piano, recalling snatches from various composers, the air being clouded alike with music and smoke wreaths.

"I think you fellows are hard on Fenton," the musician protested, in response to some remark of Ainsworth's. "I don't see what he's done to make you all so down on him."

"It isn't any thing that he has done," Tom Bently replied, "it is what he has become. He has developed an entirely new side of his nature, and a deucedly unpleasant one, too."

"I always had a mental reservation on Fenton," remarked another. "He was always insisting that his soul was his own, don't you know; and when a man keeps that up I always conclude that he has his private doubts on the subject; or if he hasn't, I have."

"That's about the case with all the musical rowing we've been having for the last year or two;

every musician has been in a fever lest he should be thought to be truckling to somebody."

"What rubbish all this concert business is," remarked Tom. "In Boston a concert interests a little *clique* of people, and another bigger *clique* pretend to be interested. The nonsense that is talked about music here is nauseating. The public doesn't really care any thing about it. In Boston a concert is given in Music Hall; but in Paris it is given in the whole city. It is an event there, not a trifling incident."

"What do you know about music?" retorted the player, clashing a furious discord with his elbow as he turned towards the speaker. "I'll attend to you presently. Now I want to know about Fenton. What has he done that you are all blackguarding him?"

"I think he's got a creed," said Ainsworth, scowling and smiling together, according to his wont. "I hate to charge a man with any thing so black, but I think Fenton's wife has made him take a creed, and a pretty damned narrow one at that."

"By Jove!" the musician observed, solemnly. "It's too bad. Fenton is a mighty bright fellow, and no end obliging."

"If it's only a creed," swore Bently, "what's all this fuss about? Every body has a creed, hasn't he? A man's temperament is his creed."

"It isn't his having a creed that I object to,"

remarked Grant Herman; "it is the question of his sincerity that troubles me. If he has taken up some collection of dogmas merely to please his wife—who seems a very sweet, quiet body—that is of course against him; but if he believes it, I don't see why we should object."

"Believes it!" sniffed Ainsworth, in great contempt. "That is worse than any thing I've said. I don't think Fenton is quite such an idiot as that comes to. The idea of his believing in Puritanism! Oh, good Lord!"

"Puritanism," Bently threw in irrelevantly, and because he liked the sound of it, "Puritanism is the preliminary rottenness of New England. If he is struck with that by all means let him go; the further the better."

"Isn't it his night for the Pagans this month?" somebody inquired.

"Yes," returned Bently, "but I took the liberty of going to him and asking if he would let me take it this turn. I hope you fellows don't mind."

The talk thus flowed on in a desultory fashion amid ever thickening clouds of tobacco smoke, and Grant Herman, sitting for the most part quiet, had a whimsical idea in looking at his half-extinguished cigar. Certain excellent cigars, his thoughts ran, have a way of burning sluggishly about the middle, and without actually going out, yet need to be relighted; and in the same way a man's life goes on better for the kindling flame of

a fresh attachment in middle life. He fell into reverie, thinking of Helen and of Ninitta. He had not seen the Italian since her flight, but from Mrs. Greyson he had learned the story of the finding and recovery of the fugitive; and his heart kindled with gratitude toward the woman who had prevented consequences which he should have fruitlessly regretted. He became so absorbed in his thoughts that only the entrance of Fred Rangely aroused him.

"Hallo, Rangely," the new comer was greeted, "where do you come from at this time of night?"

"Oh, from the office of the Daily Day-before-yesterday. I had an article in, and I wanted to read the proof. I can stand any thing in the world better than I can endure a compositor's blunders. Do any of you know Dr. Ashton?"

"I do," somebody answered. "What of him?"

"Rather clever fellow, wasn't he?"

"Why, yes; I think he is. He's rather odd sometimes. What about him?"

"Dead."

"Nonsense! I saw him myself not three hours ago, posting a letter in the box opposite his office."

"He is dead, though. Heart disease. They just got the news at the *Advertiser* office."

"Where was he?"

"In his office. The night porter of the building heard him fall against the door. They say he must have died without a struggle."

XXX.

HOW CHANCES MOCK.

11 Henry IV.; iii.—1.

EARLY on the following forenoon Helen took her way to the studio. She was in unusually good spirits that day, for no especial reason that she could have told, although indeed it is possible that the prospect of meeting Grant Herman may have subtly contributed to the buoyancy of her mood.

She walked briskly through the bracing morning across the Common, her mind full of bright fancies. A thin column of smoke arose from the chimney of the lodge in the deer-park, rising straight in the clear air, and cheerfully suggestive that some tiny family, not too large for the building, were at breakfast within. It might even be the deer themselves; and Helen smiled at her whim, almost laughing outright as a picture arose of a matronly doe preparing coffee, while a solemn buck sat in his easy chair before the fire, reading his morning paper and now and then glancing at his wife over his spectacles.

In this joyous mood she came to the studio. A sudden thought darted through her mind, with no

apparent connection, of the talk of the night previous, and for an instant her face clouded ; but the exhilaration of the morning and the reaction from the sad, overstrained state in which her husband had left her, both helped her to throw off all mournful thoughts. Ninitta had not arrived, and Mrs. Greyson busied herself about the bas-relief, preparing for work. Suddenly the tap of Grant Herman sounded upon her door.

" Good morning," he said, entering in response to her invitation. " I knew by your step that you were in good spirits, and it gave me so much pleasure to think you were glad to be back, that I had to come up."

" I am in good spirits," she returned. " It is such a glorious morning, and Ninitta has kept me away from my work long enough for me to be very glad to return to it."

" What of Ninitta ? " he asked, a shadow coming over his fine face. " She is not still with you ? "

" No, but she is coming to pose this morning, though I hardly think she is strong enough."

The sculptor took in his hands a bit of clay and began nervously to model it into various shapes.

" Why did you take her home, Mrs. Greyson ? " he asked after a moment's silence.

" Because she needed me," Helen answered. " And besides," she added hesitatingly, " I thought you would like her to be under my care."

" Did you ? " he returned eagerly. " I was more

grateful to you than you would let me tell you! I——"

He broke off abruptly as if determined to keep himself from any dangerous demonstrativeness.

"Come into my studio a moment," said he, throwing down the clay he held. "I have something to show you."

Helen followed willingly, glad to avoid the chance of their being interrupted by the arrival of Ninitta, whose jealousy might easily be aroused again. The sculptor led the way through a couple of chambers, bringing her out at the top of the stairs leading down in the corner of his studio. The morning sun shone in through the window far up in the side wall, tinged to rich colors by the stained glass which Herman had set there. The statues and casts looked in the light coming from above them, as if they had just emerged from garments of shadows which yet lay fallen about their feet. Helen uttered an exclamation of admiration.

"How charming the studio is in this light," she said. "It is like looking down into a ghost world."

"It is a ghost world," was the response. "It has long been haunted, but I had not supposed that any eyes but my own saw the wraiths which dwell here."

The vibratory quality in his voice warned her not to answer. She felt that she stood upon the

brink of a significant interview, yet she lacked the resolution to turn back.

She descended the first flight of steps into the gallery, the sculptor following closely. She could not have defined to herself what she wished or intended. Somewhat paradoxically she wished to escape from Herman, yet had she fled she would have been unhappy had he not pursued. Nothing is more contradictory than a nascent passion, and, indeed, the tenderness of any woman for a man is not very profound if unmixed with some desire to escape from him.

All sorts of artistic rubbish had accumulated in the little gallery; broken casts, fragments of statues and vases, pieces of time discolored marble, and the thousand objects which make up the *débris* of a sculptor's studio. A bit of warm colored though faded tapestry hung dustily over the railing of the little balcony, making the white plaster goddess appear doubly wan. Against it stood a small antique altar, around whose base a train of garland-bearing Cupids danced in immortal glee.

"How lovely," Mrs. Greyson said eagerly. "I never saw this altar before. Where did you get it, and why is it hidden up here?"

"I picked it up in Rome, years ago," Herman returned, a trifle shamefacedly. "It came from somewhere in Greece. Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes; but why is it hidden here?" she repeated.

"The truth is that when I was young and romantic, I bought that altar—it is a Hymeneal altar, they say—and said I would pour a libation upon it at my marriage; a sentimental and heathenish notion enough."

He paused a moment, a certain hesitancy showing itself more and more definitely in his manner. He glanced at his companion, then looked away into the ghost world below. Her heart was beating quickly. She cast down her eyes, her hand, the whiter by contrast with the discolored marble, resting upon the altar.

"When I left Rome," he resumed, "I could not quite make up my mind to leave it behind; so I had it boxed up and sent home. It has been boxed up ever since until—until recently."

However determined Helen might be to avoid dangerous topics, she was yet a woman, and she had in her heart a strong yearning towards the sculptor which could hardly be repressed. Before she had considered to what the question might lead, she asked:

"And recently?"

"Recently," re-echoed he, regaining his composure, "I took it out and meant it to stand down in the corner there to remind me."

He pointed as he spoke, down into the studio below, still dim, since the screens covered the large windows. Her glance followed his motion in an abstracted, impersonal way.

"To remind you?" she in turn echoed.

"To remind me," he took up the words again, "that I am like other men, and that life is at best an aspiration; at worst a despair."

She understood the intimation of his words, but it seemed not to touch her. She did not flush or start, but regarded abstractedly the jocund Cupids. Then she raised her eyes to his face.

"But you removed it here."

"Yes," he said. "Our friend Fenton once said that there is in this world only one good, into which all others resolve themselves—the amelioration of life. The reminder, with all its suggestiveness, was too poignant; I ameliorated my life by putting it up here out of sight."

She did not question him further, but, gathering up her dress, turned and went down the next flight of stairs, which brought her to a landing eight or ten feet from the floor of the studio. There she turned again and looked back at him descending. She almost seemed to herself not to speak, yet by some inward volition her lips formed the words:

"Hope is only a bubble, yet it rims with rainbows whatever we see mirrored in it."

"Yes?" he returned, inquiringly.

"I was only thinking," replied she, continuing her descent, "that it is worth some pains to keep the bubble unbroken as long as possible."

"But facts are such achromatic glasses."

To this she made no answer, and together they moved towards a modeling stand upon which stood something covered with wet cloths. These the sculptor carefully removed.

A perfectly nude male figure was disclosed, exquisitely modeled, and of superb proportions. It lay upon a hillock, about which fragments of broken weapons and the torn ground indicated a recent battle. The head and limbs of the figure drooped down the sides of the mound, falling with the limpness of death. About the noble, lifeless head were bent and broken stalks of poppies, ridden down by the horses, yet not wholly destroyed.

Herman and Mrs. Greyson stood in silence looking at the figure, the pathos of the work so penetrating Helen that the tears gathered in her eyes.

"What do you call it?" she asked, struggling to regain composure.

Her companion pulled away the cloth, which still lay against the pedestal, and she saw the words:

> "I strew these opiate flowers
> Round thy restless pillow."

Again she was silent. Perplexity, regret, and, more keenly than all, a delicious exultation, overcame her. She stole a half-glance up into the face of the tall form beside her.

"But he is dead," she murmured at length.

"It seems so," he assented.

She turned and faced him, a sudden paleness making her very lips white.

"I have no right to let you show me this," she cried, in a voice thrilling with emotion. "My husband is alive. I never pretended to love him, but I am his wife. You must have seen him with Arthur Fenton—Dr. Ashton."

"Dr. Ashton!" he echoed, in bewilderment. "Your husband? Dr. Ashton, Fenton's friend?"

"Yes," replied she, her eyes falling, and her breast beginning to heave. "I had promised not to tell; but it was not right. I should have told you, but I could not bear—Oh," she cried, breaking off her sentence abruptly, "if you despise me it is only my due!"

"Despise you! As if it were possible! But don't you know? Haven't you been told?"

"Know? Been told?" demanded Helen, in alarm. "What is it?"

"Haven't you seen the morning paper, even?"

"No. What was in it? Has any thing happened to Dr. Ashton?"

"Yes," Herman said slowly, wondering in a baffled way if it was possible to soften the blow. "He is dead."

"Dead!"

Her cry rang out sharply in the dim studio, over that clay figure of a lifeless warrior.

A cry of horror, of pain, and, too, of remorse. There was in it nothing of love, only that name.

less fear that death brings, and still more that groundless self-reproach which sensitive natures must feel when confronted by the irremediable—as if some blame must be taken for the acts of fate. Imaginative natures never quite shake off the responsibility of the inevitable, and Helen began instinctively to question herself. The scene of the previous night came before her. Ought she to have yielded to the love which had called her, late aftermath of a blighted wedded life? At least when her husband spoke of his suffering she might more strongly——A sudden thought pierced her like a knife.

"How did he die?" she questioned breathlessly.

"Of heart disease."

So then the world would not know the truth, if what she feared were truth.

"I will go home," she said. "Please tell Ninitta."

When she reached her rooms she found a letter, addressed in Dr. Ashton's hand, which the penny-post had left for her after she had gone out in the morning. It contained only an impression in wax which resembled a large seal. With hot eyes she bent over it, making nothing of its reversed letters. Then, with a sudden thought, she held it before the glass, seeing in the mirror the words, which read backwards, like the life of him whose last act had been their forming:

"DEATH FOILS THE GODS."

XXXI.

HE SPEAKS THE MERE CONTRARY.

Love's Labor's Lost ; i.—1.

"EDITH," Arthur Fenton said, looking up from his paper at breakfast that morning, "Dr. Ashton is dead."

"Dead!" she exclaimed.

Her husband's indifferent tone shocked her. She was not without an unphrased feeling that death was so sacred or at least so solemn a subject that it should be treated with reverence. Any jesting upon it made her cringe, and the light mention of it seemed to her almost immoral.

"So the paper says," replied he; and he read aloud the paragraph containing the announcement of Dr. Ashton's sudden death from heart disease. "It is too bad," he commented. "He was a mighty smart fellow and square as a brick. I wonder what made him do it now."

"Made him do what?" she asked. "How strangely you talk. Made him die?"

"Yes; that's what I meant. I knew he had a trouble which would probably make him do it sooner or later, but I'd no idea it would come so soon."

"Arthur, what do you mean," Edith repeated, the tears coming into her eyes. "I don't like to hear you speak of death so—so—flippantly."

"Flippantly, my dear?" returned he. "I'm sure I don't know why you should use that word. If a man takes his life, why shouldn't I speak of it,—to you, that is; of course I should not in public."

"Takes his life!" she cried. "Do you mean—"

"Of course I know nothing about it," her husband replied as coolly as ever, and watching sharply the effect of his words; "but I presume Will took poison, poor old fellow."

She sank back in her chair, white and trembling.

"It is what might have been expected," she said. "It almost seems as if Providence measured to him the portion of poor Frontier."

"Providence is noted for close observance of the *lex talionis*," sneered Arthur, "but Dr. Ashton didn't believe in the existence of that functionary, so it really ought to have passed him by. It would certainly have been more dignified."

"But, oh!" she cried out, apparently not hearing or not heeding his last words, "into what sort of a world have you brought me, Arthur? Are all your friends so desperate that they think only of taking their own lives? Have they no faith, no hope, no beyond? I feel as if it were all a dreadful nightmare! It cannot be you alone, for Mrs. Greyson and Dr. Ashton— Oh, Arthur, where

has religion, where has morality gone? Oh, I cannot understand it! I cannot bear it!"

She laid her bowed head on her arms upon the pretty breakfast table, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Her husband looked at her with intense irritation, and an inward curse that he had ever married her. He sipped his coffee; he noted with admiration the rich, glowing hues of the dull blue bowl of nasturtiums which adorned the table.

"There, Edith," he said at length, "it is rather idle to cry over the sins of your neighbors. According to your creed each of us has enough of his own derelictions to answer for, without going abroad for things to repent. As for religion, I suppose girls who do Kensington work will use it for decorative purposes for some time to come, but thinking people long ago outgrew such folly. In regard to my friends, it is all a question of standards, as I've said no end of times. From my point of view they are very sensible people, and you a little bigot. Grant Herman believes some pious nonsense, though he has too good taste to obtrude it, and I dare say Bently and Rangely have their superstitions. There are probably ten thousand people in this good city of Boston—and for aught I know a hundred thousand—who believe, or, if you like, disbelieve, as I do."

"It cannot be true," was Edith's reply. "But if it is so, it is too sad to think of."

"Why, I suspect," Arthur continued lightly, "that the Pagans regard me as too orthodox lately, though you'd hardly agree with them."

She made no reply, and Arthur continued his breakfast in silence. The sun shone in at the windows, the soft coal fire sputtered in the grate, and to all appearance the room was full of cheerfulness. Edith leaned her head upon her hand and reflected sadly. She resolved that her husband should be weaned from the Pagans, if that were within her power. She seemed to herself to relinquish joy in life, and to devote herself wholly to duty.

The entrance of a servant with the morning letters interrupted further conversation, until Arthur tossed his wife a letter which Dr. Ashton had mailed at the same time he posted the missive which Helen received later in the day.

"There, you see," Fenton remarked. "Of course I show it to you in confidence."

The room swam before Edith as she read, but she forced herself to be outwardly calm, as she ran her eye over this note:

DEAR ARTHUR:—

I've a strong presentiment—and although I disbelieve in presentiments, mine generally come true—that in about half an hour my obituary will be in order. Certain easily foreseen contingencies have determined me to give it up. I shall never have a better chance to make my exit dramatically, and you've often assured me that that is the chief thing to consider in this connection. I've contemplated such a possibility long enough to have my affairs in order, and doubtless your wife will have a mass or two said for the repose of my soul. If you ever have a chance to do Helen a good turn,

you may regard it as a personal favor to my ghost to do it. I've left you my Diaz as a sort of propitiatory sop. Yours, of course, as ever,

W. A.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" Edith sobbed, breaking down again. "It is awful! It is just as he always talked. It is as light as if he were going out to drive."

"Naturally," was the response. "If you fancy Will would cry baby at death, you knew him far from as well as I did. How strange it is to think of his being in the past tense, poor fellow. It was clever of him to leave me his Diaz; I always coveted it."

In the face of this, what was there for Edith to say. She was simply numbed to silence, and horror at her husband for the time deadened all sense of the shock of Dr. Ashton's death. It was not until later in the day that she was able to think of Helen.

"But, Arthur," she said then, "Mrs. Greyson?"

"Well; what of Mrs. Greyson?"

"I am going to see her."

"After your last night's indignation?"

"I may have been wrong," Mrs. Fenton said bravely. "I may have been hard. I realize every day how little I am able to judge for other people. Perhaps I am narrow, as you say. At least now her husband is dead I can show her my sympathy; and since I know more of him, it does not seem so strange that she left him."

"They left each other," he responded to these contradictory words. "But what can you say? The consolations of religion will hardly be available, and Helen never pretended to love Ashton?"

His tone wounded her, but she answered without a change of countenance:

"The death of the man who has been her husband can never be indifferent to any true woman. I shall not force her to listen to any religion she does not wish to hear."

XXXII.

A SYMPATHY OF WOE.

Titus Andronicus ; iii.—1.

"I AM afraid you will think me intrusive," was Edith's hesitating greeting to Helen, "but I could not help coming. I thought you might feel lonely."

Helen looked at her for a moment with wistful eyes and trembling lips: then she crossed swiftly to where her friend stood and kissed her. And never could these two be so wholly separated or estranged again as to efface the memory of all the meaning that this caress conveyed. The word which Edith had used had been most happily chosen. Her woman's instinct divined the loneliness which overwhelmed the widow, and this proof of her sympathy was the passport to Mrs. Greyson's heart. Loneliness was the feeling of which Helen was most of all conscious. The death of even an indifferent acquaintance often may seem to desolate the earth from its simple irremediableness, and much more does the removal of one near to us make the world appear half a void.

Helen had been sitting alone before Edith came, reviewing her past and drearily speculating of her

future. She went over the days of her wedded life; her innocent, introspective childhood, in which she had dreamed and read, dwelling in a world apart; alone but for the ideal creations of her books or her own quick fancy. She had married knowing as little of life or of love, as when, a lonely child, she had spelled out the tale of Prince Camaralzaman, and wondered what the divine passion really was, or if indeed it had existence, outside of fairy lore.

The torch of death throws its glare backward, and its funeral light showed many a past long since forgotten, but now revealed with new and distorting vividness. Helen remembered the baby which had lived but long enough to open its eyes with a smile that seemed of recognition, and then faded back into the unknown whence it had come. A throb of tenderness for the dead father moved the mother's heart as she thought of her baby, so little time hers, and so long asleep under the marguerites of a grave over the sea. She had suffered much from the selfishness, the dominant self-will, the distorted views of life of Dr. Ashton; and these things she even now could not forget; but, too, she thought of him as the father of her child, her baby ever dear and living in memory.

She reflected, too, of the men she had known, and especially of Arthur Fenton. Her nature had need of some one upon whom to expend its treas-

ures, and she realized that had she not felt in the artist a certain insincerity, he might have awakened her love. He had been appreciative, sympathetic, brilliant; and, too, he had called largely upon her patience and forbearance, than which there is no surer way to win a generous woman's affection. Yet always some note rang false to her fine ear, and to the weakness of his nature she had never been wholly blind, although not until his marriage had given him a certain distance had she realized how deep and unsparing her knowledge of him really was.

Of Grant Herman she would not think. Thoughts of him arose again and again in her mind, but she resolutely put them down. Some secret stir of mingled pain and joy told her too well that the sculptor had awakened the first love of her life. But at least with her husband, however unloved, lying yet unburied, she would not dwell upon the passion of another.

She took Edith's hand, and the two women sat down side by side, shedding tears together, rather from a sense of the general woe and bitterness of life than for poignant grief for the present calamity. It was not much they said at first. Neither was of the talkative order of women, finding comfort in the mere utterance of words. They grew together, sustained by giving and receiving tenderness, and each tacitly asking and according forgiveness for unfriendly feelings in the past. It is

probable, too, that Edith, heavy with the disappointments of her married life, found relief in being able to weep unrestrainedly, even though the true source of her tears was not the obvious one.

"I never loved him," Helen said of her husband. "After we separated we became friends, rather because of a common past when we were both strangers here, than from any fitness for each other. But he was once my husband."

Her friend pressed her hand in silence.

"We had a child," Helen spoke again; "a little daughter. She only lived one day. If she had not gone it might have been different. At least we should have kept on together. My poor little baby!"

Edith's eyes were full of tears, as she answered softly:

"I hope you will let me say that I believe she is waiting for you some where."

"She must be," the mother responded quickly. "Whatever one doubts, one must surely believe that. I could not lose her! She is mine, wherever in the universe she may be."

"Yes," was all Edith ventured in reply. "I am sure of it."

They gave no heed to the fading day, but sat with clasped hands until twilight had gathered, and it occurred at last to Mrs. Fenton that her husband and dinner must be awaiting her. Helen had been telling of her plans.

"I shall go abroad," she said, "I want to study in Rome; I want to meet great men; to be influenced by great works. I have been thinking of it for a long time, and now it seems as if some ties that held me here are broken, for we often obey claims which we yet deny. And besides," she added, in a lower tone, "it is a flight from temptation. I am in danger here."

"In danger?" Edith asked wonderingly.

"Only from myself," was the reply, "but that peril is sufficiently imminent to make me afraid."

Edith questioned no further, and to the true import of these words she had no clue. She looked at her friend a moment inquiringly and musingly, but as Helen did not continue, she rose to go.

"I must get home now," she said, in a tone so tender that it seemed to beg pardon for this abandonment. "Arthur is waiting for me and his dinner; and if he doesn't get the latter at least, I won't answer for the consequences. Mr. Calvin was with him when I came away."

"Mr. Peter Calvin!" exclaimed the other, in some surprise.

"Yes; he has bought one of Arthur's pictures, and he wants Arthur to propose him at the St. Filipe Club, I believe."

She spoke in perfect ignorance of the tumult her words excited in her hearer's mind. Long after Edith was gone Helen sat looking

out into the darkening sky and thinking of Arthur Fenton. She had heard him talk too often about Mr. Peter Calvin not to know what was implied by this new friendship. Mr. Peter Calvin had been for years the head and front of Boston Philistinism in art. He had been the patron of subservient artists; the chairman of committees for the purchase of public statues; an elegant writer upon such live and timely topics as *Plaster Casting among the Egyptians*, *Notes upon Abyssinian Statues*, while his monograph upon the question, *What Was the Original Cost of the Venus de Milo?* had by his flatterers been pronounced the masterpiece of all known art essays for power and critical research. His was a prominent name upon the covers of dilettante art journals; it was he who effectually crushed young and too daringly independent artists; who repressed impertinent originality; who headed the hosts of conventionality against individuality or genius which held itself above the established canons of antiquated tradition. He was the High Priest of Boston conservatism; the presiding genius of Philistia; and until the St. Filipe Club entered a protest against him by refusing to admit him to membership, his power had scarcely received a blow.

Tom Bently always insisted, with much profanity, that Mr. Peter Calvin was a joke.

"He writes with tremendous pomposity," Tom would say, "and he is in no end of societies for

molly-coddling art. He goes on, too, about the plaster casts at that hospital for decrepit gods, the Art Museum, as if his whole soul was in the plaster barrels of the Greeks. But bless your soul! It's only his little joke. He doesn't really mean any thing by it. He's only a stupendous joke himself."

The Pagans, so far as they were to be regarded as an entity, represented the protest of the artistic soul against shams. They stood for sincerity above every thing; for utter honesty in art, in life, in manners and morals alike. To them Philistinism was the substitution of convention for conviction. For the spirit of imitation, of blind subservience to authority, the Pagans had no tolerance. While they held themselves always open to conviction, they refused assent to any thing which was offered them *ex cathedra;* they devoted themselves to art with a passion of enthusiasm which was in itself the highest expression of their principles. That they seemed often iconoclastic was in reality less the result of their hatred of authority than the prevalence of unreasoning, and therefore by their standards necessarily insincere, adherence to established formulæ. Dogmas they hated, not because they were popularly received, but because although they had been vital realities to their originators, they had become in time mere lifeless forms, held in reverence by blind devotees long after the soul had gone out of them.

In art especially the Pagans demanded the most absolute surrender of self to truth; and it should be added that they defined truth exactly as Helen did, "that which one sincerely believes." They had no condemnation too severe or sweeping for the artist who worshipped the golden gods of Philistia by following popular conventions at the expense of his honest art ideals. It is not impossible that they carried this feeling to extremes sometimes, suspecting every thing which was stamped with popular approval, but in the main at least their standard was of the highest and their lives conformed well to it. Measured by the creeds they rejected, they might often enough be found wanting; tried by their own, there had never been an apostate among them until the defection of Fenton.

No one had been more bitter and outspoken in his condemnation of Mr. Calvin and of what he represented than Arthur Fenton. Many a time he had entertained Helen with stories of the presumption and the ignorance of this man whom now he was receiving into his friendship, or, more properly, in whose train of sycophants he had taken his place.

Helen could not forgive him. Leaving dinner untasted, she sat with burning cheeks in the darkness, mourning over the apostacy of the man who had been her warmest friend.

XXXIII.

A MINT OF PHRASES IN HIS BRAIN.

Love's Labor's Lost ; i.—1.

DR. ASHTON had been in his grave several weeks. Life had gone on much as usual in Boston, with the bickerings of small souls, the gaping imitations of the mob, the carping of the self-appointed critics, and the earnest endeavor of the honest and inspired workers, who leaven the lump of modern civilization.

Among the Pagans the nomination of Mr. Calvin to the St. Filipe Club by Arthur Fenton had been received with a bitterness born of a feeling of outraged confidence. They were to-night to meet in Tom Bently's studio, and Fenton, who had no intention of being present, was yet keenly conscious of what the talk there concerning him would be. He was glum and moody at dinner, and Edith, who knew that this was Pagan night, watched him wistfully. She hoped to win him away from friends and acquaintances who seemed to her dangerous. Perfectly honest and ready to lay down her life for her husband, she was yet urging him into paths which he felt it to be degradation to walk, since they led him away from

sincerity. She had no means of knowing how his sudden championship of Mr. Calvin was regarded. Her own relations to art had been those of pretty amateurishness. She had been bred to believe in conventionality, and the flavor of Bohemianism alarmed and repelled her.

To-night she had put on her most becoming dress, she had ordered the dinner with especial reference to her husband's tastes, and she exerted herself to be as entertaining and attractive as lay in her power. She even allowed herself the innocent ruse of delaying dinner a little, that it might be later before Arthur could be ready to go out; and when the answer to her timid hope that he was to be at home that evening, was in the affirmative, her foolish, tender heart fluttered with delighted hope that she was influencing him to shake off his irregular associations.

He was rather gloomy and silent all the evening, brooding of the Pagans, from whose meetings he had never before been absent, and of Helen, and what she would think. Edith tried all her arts and wiles to make him forget the pleasure he was losing, and she partly succeeded, since her attentions and endearments chimed in with the train of thought by which he was endeavoring to prove to his own satisfaction that he was the most virtuous of men, and that his swearing allegiance to Philistinism, was a noble example of a transgressor willing to confess and abjure his faults. He

accepted his wife's attentions as eminently fitting under the circumstances, and could he have forgotten the Pagans and Helen, he might almost have been comfortable. More than once in the old days he had found it hard to face Mrs. Greyson's clear eyes, which saw so readily through shams, and now while he was able to work himself into a defensive attitude towards all others of his old friends, he felt a horrible humiliation in the consciousness that Helen was sure to know of his course and to understand all its weakness.

It occurred to him, too, that Helen had avoided him of late. Since the death of Dr. Ashton, he had scarcely seen her, although she was often with his wife. He knew from Edith that she was soon to go abroad, and he wondered if the wish to escape him had any share in bringing her to this decision.

He tormented himself with speculations and memories until he could endure it no longer. He must have comfort; his wounded self-sufficiency craved the balm of approval, and although he was contemptuously conscious of his own weakness, he turned to Edith to seek admiration and praise.

"So you are glad that I am not going to the Pagans to-night," he said to her, as they sat before the fire, for the evening was damp and chilly.

"Very glad," she answered, leaving her chair to

come and sit upon a low hassock by his knee. "It was so good of you."

She made a beautiful picture as she sat there, her long dress of cardinal and stone gray silk gathered in waves about her, the Elizabethan ruffle setting off her shapely head and slender neck, while the soft, yellow old lace showed how clear was the tone of her skin. Her pure, sweet face, with its appealing dark eyes, was turned upward to her husband's, in an expression at once wistful and full of love. Edith had always a high-bred air, and to-night her attitude and expression added the one charm of warmth and softness needed to make her most lovely and moving.

"You doubtless have some excellent reason," remarked Arthur smiling down on her.

"I am afraid of them; they are in arms against every thing that is acknowledged to be good."

"And yet they are the most honest men I ever knew," he returned, half musing, and with a little pleased sense of his magnanimity in saying this at a moment when they were probably abusing him.

"I don't know, Arthur. Perhaps they may be honest, but I am sure it is not good for you to be with them. They are so sure that their false views of life are true."

The little sting in the implication that he was not able to resist the influence which had surrounded him was forgotten in the satisfactory view which his wife took of the real value of the

judgments of the Pagans. He knew how little she understood them. With every premise upon which her conclusions were founded he disagreed, yet he said to himself that Edith was right; that the Pagans were quite too infallible about every thing. They would have him grope along poor and unknown, he argued with himself, simply for the sake of standing in the position of chronic rebuke to established authorities; with only now and then a chance to get a hearing upon what they assumed to be the true theory of art. What they believed—ah! there after all was the weakness of the whole. What ground had they for their belief? Did he himself really believe any thing, or had he a right to assert in any matter a positive conviction? And even if they or he asserted never so strongly, what sort of a test of truth was that? After all the Philistines, the Calvins, were as likely to be right as were a set of discontented if not disappointed artists; men whose natures would never allow them to be satisfied with any existing state of things, since it would inevitably differ from their dreamy ideals. And it was certainly true that the weight of authority and of numbers was with the Philistines.

"Perhaps you are right, Edith," he said aloud. "I hope so at least, for they are probably indignant enough with me."

"With you? Why?"

"Oh, they choose to think I went over to Philistia when I proposed Mr. Calvin for the St. Filipe. I'm sure I don't see why I haven't a right to propose whom I please."

"But Mr. Calvin, Arthur," responded Edith, who regarded that gentleman as one of the art gods of Boston. "I should think any body would be proud to propose him. Why, he is one of the most distinguished men in the city."

Her husband did not answer for a moment. He looked into the fire and watched his inner consciousness adapt itself to this view of the case, which than himself no one had condemned more bitterly. Yet it was the theory upon which it was necessary to rest did he expect to arrive at any comfort in the course of supporting Mr. Calvin, which he had already pursued so far that retreat was impossible. Yes, he assured himself, he could even accept this. And why not? Did not common opinion confirm it; and however much common opinion might be sneered at, it was surely the voice of the common sense of the world.

He looked down at his wife, who looked back smiling proudly. He realized how pure, how tender, how true she was. He knew, too, that she was daily and hourly weaving about him bands which held him captive to beliefs which though true to her were the veriest falsehoods to him; and that only his love of ease, his fatal complai-

sance, prevented his rending these cords as did Samson the new ropes of the Philistines. He realized that he was sacrificing his manhood, that he was bartering his convictions for flattery and ease by allying himself to Calvin and his following. He recalled Helen's remark that what is called being honest with one's self is often the subtlest form of hypocrisy, and he did not spare himself a single pang of self-humiliation and contempt; and then, when he was full to the throat with self-loathing, he let his sensuous, self-loving nature devise excuse and soothe his wounded vanity.

He looked into the fire with a smile of mingled bitterness and complacency, half ashamed, half amused at the view which introspection gave him.

But whenever into his musings came the thought of Helen it rankled like a poisoned barb. For he secretly believed that Helen loved him, and although if a man humiliates himself in the eyes of the woman he loves it is as bitter as death; yet to prove unworthy in the sight of her who hopelessly loves him, contains a more subtly envenomed shaft, which wounds that most sensitive spot in a sensuous man's nature—his vanity.

XXXIV.

HEART-BURNING HEAT OF DUTY.

Love's Labor's Lost ; 1.—1.

THAT evening Helen too sat at home, alone and full of resistless thoughts.

She had put the finishing touches to the *Flight of the Months*, completing the work with scarcely less success than at first, and in three days she was to sail for Europe. She had not allowed Dr. Ashton's death to interrupt her work, the necessity of avoiding unpleasant gossip which would be provoked by the disclosure of her relations with the dead man, being sufficient reason why she should not change her outward life. She quietly and rapidly completed the preparations for departure, and already the feeling of severance from familiar scenes cast its sadness over her.

Leaving the studio to-day, she had gone down to speak with Herman, whom she wished to take the responsibility of the firing of the bas-relief. When she had finished this errand she turned to a figure in terra-cotta whose freshness showed that it had but recently come from the kiln.

"What is this?" she asked. "I have never seen it."

"It is a Pasht," the sculptor returned. "I modeled it as a wedding present for Arthur Fenton, but luckily I did not get it done in time."

"Why 'luckily?'"

"Because I should be sorry to have given him any thing so closely connected with the Pagans, as things have turned out."

Helen did not need to ask explanations of these words, although she did not know how complete the breach between Fenton and his former friends had become.

"I am glad I am going away," she exclaimed with a sigh.

"Going away?" he echoed, dropping his modeling tools.

"Yes, I sail Saturday."

She spoke with perfect composure, yet her glance was averted. She was painfully conscious of having concealed the fact from him until this moment.

He came towards her, his eyes fixed upon her face.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, almost fiercely. "Why do you go?"

"I mean to study in Rome," she replied faintly. "I always told you that I hoped to go some day."

"But why do you go now? Why have you concealed it from me? Are you afraid of my—of my love? If any one must go it should be I; I have no right to drive you away."

"You are not driving me away; I—it is better that I should go."

"But why go now? Now you are free, and I have a right to claim you."

"No," Helen said in a voice suddenly firm, but which yet showed her inward agitation, "no; there is Ninitta. I have suffered too much myself to be willing to try to come to happiness over any woman's heart. It is better that I should go."

"Ninitta!" Herman burst out. "She has no claim; she will not even care; she—"

"No," interrupted Helen, laying her hand upon his arm. "You cannot say that; you know it is not true. You can see as well as I that Ninitta is pining her life out over your neglect. We are not free to break her heart when you yourself taught her to love."

"I have never been unkind to her," he said, a little defiantly; "except perhaps when she acted like a mad woman and broke your figures."

"In love," returned Helen, smiling faintly, and glad to take refuge in generalities, "sins of commission, as compared with the deadly sin of omission, are mere venial offenses. It is not what you have done, but what you have left undone."

"But what can I do? I cannot force myself to love her?"

"You have made her love you."

"But I outgrew her centuries ago."

"The price of growth is always to outgrow," replied Helen.

She was struggling hard to keep the conversation away from dangerous levels. She felt that she must seem heartless, but none the less she went on bravely.

"And after all what is outgrowing? It is a question of moods, of—"

But her courage failed her. Her voice trembled, she turned away from him and walked down the studio, stopping here and there as if to examine a cast or a figure, invisible through the tears which welled up in her eyes. The sculptor followed close behind her, until she put her hand upon the great Oran rug which hung before the door.

"Then you leave me," he broke out bitterly. "You make Ninitta a pretext for escaping me. You might have told me that you did not care for me. I would not have molested you."

She turned to him suddenly, and he was startled by the whiteness of her face, for she was pale to the very lips.

"Do you think it is easy for me to go," she cried passionately, "to give you up when I love you! You should help me, not make it harder. Isn't it better to part now while we have nothing to regret than to live with a wrong between us?"

"But what wrong will be between us? Surely that boyish mistake need not blight both our lives."

"Can we help it?" she asked sadly.

"We will help it! Are we merely puppets then, to be bandied about helplessly? I told her I loved her; it is no longer true, and why is the pledge that followed binding?"

"It is not simply that you gave her your word," Helen returned, struggling bravely with herself; "it is that you made her love you, and that obligation you can never shake off. Oh, it is because you are too noble to take a woman's love and then trample upon it, that I love you—that you fill my heart."

She poured out the words, her eyes blazing, her splendid form dilated, her arms involuntarily extended towards him. He took her into his embrace; not hastily, not wildly; but with a slow, irresistible movement that had in it something of solemnity. He showered kisses upon her hair, her forehead, her lips; he pressed her to his bosom as if he would absorb her into himself.

"My darling, my darling," he said, in a hoarse, fiery whisper, "I cannot give you up! Think how lonely I am; how I love you!"

She put up her face and kissed him with a long, clinging kiss; then she freed herself from his arms. They stood face to face, her eyes appealing, until his glance fell before hers.

"Yes," he said in a voice so low that she bent forward to listen, "yes; you must be right."

"I am right," she responded sadly, "I have

fought against it too much not to be sure of that."

"It is an odd way of proving my love for you to give you up," continued Herman, with a new accent of bitterness in his voice. "Oh, the folly of that boyish passion!"

He strode away from her, as she leaned panting against a modeling stand. The darkness was gathering so rapidly that when he turned back his face came out of the gloom like a surprise.

"My reward," he said, "must be that you love me; but that very reward makes it harder to deserve it. I am sure that we would be wiser and happier if we had no scruples to hamper us."

"But we have," was her response; "to take your own words, we are not mere puppets."

Again he walked away from her, and for a few moments there was no sound but that of his heavy footsteps, which seemed to make the silence more solemn and penetrating.

"I will do whatever you ask," he burst out suddenly. "I will even marry her if you wish."

"I ask nothing. It is not I but your convictions you should follow. I am not even able to advise. Your own instincts are better and nobler than any thing I can say to you." She stopped and choked back a sob. "Oh, Grant, it is so hard!" she cried.

She had never used that name before, and it so thrilled him with joy and pain that he made an impulsive movement as if once more to take her

in his arms; but she lifted her hand with a gesture of negation.

"I have been tempted as well as you," she continued. "I have said to myself a thousand times that love justified all, and that these theories were too fine spun. I could not keep the thought of you down even when I first knew I was a widow, and I said over and over to myself that now no one stood between us. I knew it was no use, but I lay awake in the night and tried to prove to myself that Ninitta had no claim,—but, oh! you are too much to me for me to be willing that you should do what we both know is wrong and cruel. I can endure any thing better than that you should not always be my ideal; and I should hate myself if I tempted you to wrong."

"What I am," he said brokenly, moved most of all by the tears upon her cheeks, "is nothing. You have beaten this temptation, not I; I would have done any thing if you had encouraged me. I am a very ordinary mortal, Helen, when one really knows my littleness."

She smiled through her tears at him.

"You shall not abuse yourself;" she replied. "I will not have it."

There was not much further said between them. They remained together until the dusk filled the studio, and it looked again like a ghost-world as on the morning they two had come into it to see the dead form modeled in red clay. Perhaps it

was upon this remembrance that at length Mrs. Greyson said:

"Will you give me, before I go to Europe, that figure you showed me?"

"I will give you any thing you ask," he answered; "I wish I might add myself. Is it right," he added, with sudden fire, "for me to tie myself to that model girl? Am I worth nothing better than that?"

"You are worth the best woman on earth; but —oh, I cannot argue it, but I feel it; I am sure that it cannot be right to deny the claim which you yourself gave her, Grant. I know by myself what it would be to lose you."

"But she is not the woman you are. Her feelings are those of an ignorant peasant; she—"

Helen laid her fingers lightly upon his lips.

"No," she said, "don't go on. We have said it all once. You are trying to out-argue your own convictions. I must go now. It is almost dark already."

She took a step or two towards the door and again laid her hand upon the rug *portière*. Then as by a common impulse they turned towards each other, and once more she was locked in his embrace.

And to-night, sitting alone in the dark, with dilated eyes, Helen felt still the ecstasy of that moment, but murmured to herself:

"It must not be again; I will not see him alone."

XXXV.

PARTED OUR FELLOWSHIP.

Othello ; ii.—1.

TOM BENTLY'S studio that night was a sight well worth seeing.

Tom had two rooms in Studio Building, opening into each other by folding doors, which were never known to be shut. The walls were hung with old French tapestry, its rich, soft colors harmonizing exquisitely with some dull-red velvet draperies from Venice. Bits of armor, some of them very splendid, were disposed here and there, while a wealth of *bric-à-brac* enriched every nook and corner. In the doorway hung an old altar-lamp of silver, with a cup of ruby glass, and from various points depended other lamps of Moresque and antique shapes. A pair of tall brass flambeau-stands, spoil of a Belgian cathedral sacked a couple of centuries ago, upheld the heaviest candles Tom had been able to find, which smoked and flared most picturesquely.

Bently had traveled widely, every where picking up graceful and artistic trifles—stuffs from Algiers ; rugs from Persia and Turkey ; weapons from Tripoli and India and Tunis ; musical instruments from

Egypt and Spain; antiques from Greece and Germany and Italy; and pottery from every where. His studio was the envy of all his brother artists, although he himself growled about it profanely, declaring that he had so much rubbish about him that he could not work, yet nevertheless declining to part with a single object.

"I ought to clear the place out," he would say. "My pictures are getting to look like advertisements of an old clo' shop, and if a man doesn't change all his properties every year, the sapient critics say he has become mannered. But I can't let them go; or rather they won't let me go; they hang on like barnacles to an old hulk."

The Pagans were six that night, Fenton's place being unfilled. The delinquency of the absent artist was a good deal commented upon, yet always as if an effort were made to keep the subject out of the conversation. It came up again and again, and that not unnaturally, since it was necessarily in every man's thoughts.

"He's a mellifluous coward, now isn't he?" Bently remarked, with his usual picturesque disregard of the conventional use of words. "The average American couldn't have been more sneaking."

"He was always afraid of the rough grain of life," Rangely responded. "I always told him he was a born coward. He could never serve any cause that wouldn't give him a uniform of broad-

cloth. But he was born for something better than tagging after Calvin and his tribe, heaven knows."

"Bah!" went on Bently, "the bad taste of it! I could get over every thing else, but the bad taste of proving a sneak, and giving up every thing worth while."

Somebody threw in a quotation from Browning's *Lost Leader*, and then Grant Herman, trying to turn the conversation, took up Bently's remark.

"You're right, Tom," he said, "in your view of taste. Taste is sublimated morality. It is the appreciation of the proportion and fitness of all things in the universe, and of course it is above simple morality, for that is founded upon a partial view. Taste is the universal, where a system of morals is the local."

"Can't you say that of art?" asked Rangely. "I should think art is the universal, where religion is the provincial. A religion expresses the needs and the aspirations of a race or a country, while art embodies the aspirations and attributes of humanity."

"Good!" Bently responded. "That is better than I should have said it, but it's my belief, all the same. There are so few people who have imagination enough even to understand what one means by saying that art is the only thing in the world worth living for. Why, art is the supreme

expression of humanity; the apotheosis of all the best there is in the race."

"I don't see that," objected another. "Isn't religion the expression of the longings of the soul, or whatever there is in us we call soul? I can't say it well, but it seems to me you talk of religions, not religion."

"People seldom take the trouble to make that distinction. He who attacks any of the religions is generally set down as striking at religion itself."

"Religion," returned Bently, "is the expression of fear, and nothing else, if you sift it to the bottom. Knowledge kills so-called religion as surely as it does those lower forms of belief which it is nowadays the fashion to dub superstition. It is precisely the same feeling that builds churches and that rhymes the country hag's charms. Fairies and saints are double and twisted cousins, after all."

"But religion," persisted the German, "is more than the expression of fear; it is the embodiment of the aspirations of mankind; of the instinct and desire for worship."

"For worshipping something," amended Tom. "That is the same thing differently phrased."

"No, it isn't, either. To yearn for the higher is not to show that we fear it, but that we long to grow like it. It is a confession of incompleteness, of weakness, I grant you; but a thousand times no to your calling it fear."

"I confess to having been hasty, and modify my words so far as to say; an expression of fear or weakness."

"Is there then any shame in acknowledging weakness?" demanded the German, pushing him as hard as he was able. "It certainly is honest."

"Is there any shame to formulating fear?" retorted the other, deftly evading him.

"Then see how religion always appeals to art to help out its ultimate expression," observed Rangely.

"And how it has failed," added Bently, "when it has not had art to help it. Puritanism tried to get on without art, and where is Puritanism? You couldn't find a trace of it, if it hadn't come down on its marrow-bones and begged art to build its churches, compose its music, and regulate its rituals."

"It is no more fair to say that," objected another Pagan, doggedly, "than to say that art has gone to religion for help. Their accounts are pretty evenly balanced."

"Nonsense!" Rangely returned. "Art has never gained by being religious, but by being art; but religion owes its hold largely to the help art has given it."

"And it has paid its debts by blackguarding art from every pulpit it has builded for it."

"As Fenton used to say," Ainsworth remarked, "art has been used as the sugar-coating to the bitter pill of religion."

"Oh, Fenton again," Bently exclaimed impatiently. "What did you bring him up for? Who the devil would have thought Fenton would have turned out so?"

"I can tell you a piece of news," said Rangely. "The Election Committee blackballed Calvin this afternoon."

"Good!" cried they all; and some body added: "But Fenton said he'd resign if Calvin wasn't elected."

"Resign," echoed Rangely, "I guess he'll have to. He's been sent to Coventry by half the Club now for that Graves affair."

"The Graves affair?" some one queried. "What's that? What else has he been doing? If a man starts to go to the devil, it does seem as if he never could get ahead fast enough."

"Miss Graves was going to buy one of Flackerman's pictures, and heaven knows he needs the money; and Fenton, who has always pretended to be Flack's friend, talked her into taking one of his instead; or rather he got Calvin to go to her and do it. It was a stunning Flackerman, too; and we were all rejoicing over his luck."

"I would not be too ready to believe that story," Grant Herman said. "I don't think Fenton's gone utterly to the bad all at once. He's living expensively, they say, and possibly he let Calvin go to Miss Graves; but I don't believe Arthur ever originated that sneaking scheme, and

I shouldn't be surprised if he never knew the rights of the case."

"He's done what so many artists have been bullied into doing before," Ainsworth observed. "If he has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, that is precisely what the patrons of art in this country demand that every man shall do who comes here. I could tell you of a dozen good fellows who've been spoiled in that way. I am far enough outside to look on in an unbiased way; but they treat us architects in the same fashion. Lots of the most rubbishy and conventional men we have, started out to be fair and work from conviction; and they simply had the choice between subservience and starvation, and cases of the choice of death from starvation haven't been over plenty."

"Oh, a man is known by the tailor he keeps," threw in Rangely; "especially if he doesn't pay him."

"It's all a game of cut-throat," Bently remarked philosophically; "art and business alike."

"I should hate to have my throat cut," observed the German Pagan in a matter of fact tone; "it must let a dreadful draught into the system."

"Oh, if you were beheaded," cried Rangely, "you'd turn into a capital beer fountain, so your friends would find some consolation, even in your loss."

A diversion was caused here by the production

of a splendid Japanese punch-bowl, supported upon a teakwood stand. In it the host proceeded to brew a potent and steaming mixture, whose fragrance must have delighted the jocund gods of jollity and laughter. Tom was notorious for being chronically in pecuniary difficulties, but he was always adding to his collection of *bibelots*, and he never was known to lack the means of concocting a glorious punch.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Ainsworth, "how good that smells. It almost overcomes the general mustiness of Tom's den here, which usually has all the odors of the Ghetto from which his things are dragged."

"Casper is intoxicated already with the mere fumes," retorted Bently good humoredly. "He's bound to fill a drunkard's grave sooner or later."

"No; I never shall," chuckled the other. "I'm altogether too good natured to crowd the drunkard out."

This sally was received with applause, and the glasses being filled, the usual toasts to the goddess Pasht and to art were drank.

"And to our seven," went on Herman, holding up his glass, and going on with the formula they had, half unconsciously, fallen into the habit of using, although they made no pretense of having a ritual.

But he set his glass down untasted, suddenly

remembering that their ranks were broken, and the others followed his example.

"The difference between religion and art," broke out Rangely, hurriedly, to cover the awkward silence which followed, "is that religion is a matter of tradition, of convention; it rests upon authority, while art springs from inner conviction."

"Sophistry," retorted the German, picking up the gauntlet; "there have been a good many things said here to-night which sound well but won't stand fire. It is precisely for following conventions in art that we blame Fenton."

"And that proves my point."

"No, it doesn't; there's as much art that depends upon tradition as there is religion."

"No," replied Rangely. "In so far as art gets its inspiration from fossil tradition it is lifeless and indeed ceases to be art. Religion presupposes something exterior; while art is the outgrowth of the individual's own mind, the best expression of his inner strength."

"Religion," Herman threw in, "demands the existence of the unknown; art only the existence of the inexpressible."

"Yet art devotes itself to expression."

"Yes, but more to suggesting. It phrases the possible so as to suggest that which is above and beyond expression, yet toward which it helps the emotions and the imagination. I think a man's

soul a matter of very little moment as compared to his imagination, and it is because art ministers to the latter that I place it above religion."

The talk was diverted here by some laughing remark which led on to a train of gay badinage. The German tried to bring the conversation back to serious levels, but in vain.

"Oh, what fustian we've given ourselves up to to-night," laughed Rangely.

"It amuses me to hear you fellows discuss religion," Tom Bently observed. "You wander round the subject as aimlessly as the young women in the first half hour of a Harvard symphony concert."

"Never you mind, Bently," rejoined Ainsworth. "You are sure of coming out all right; the gods are bound to protect humbug, for on it depends their own existence."

They drifted in little groups to different parts of the studio, admiring this or that bit of grace or beauty. Then the German, who was a professional musician, tuned an old mandolin with which a Venetian lover some star-lit night centuries ago, may have serenaded his loved one from his gondola; and to its trembling accompaniment sang a quaint chansonette, his Teutonic accent making havoc among its liquid Italian syllables. Then Rangely possessed himself of a strange African instrument, a crooked gourd, hollowed and strung with twisted tree fibers, and

joined to the notes of the mandolin, its weird, cicada-like harshness. The duet moved Bently to clear a miscellaneous collection of articles from the lid of a spinnet of the time of Louis XIV., upon which be-powdered and be-patched dames, long forgotten, had strummed pretty little tinkling tunes, while all about them other marionette-like ladies and gallants played at little tinkling loves, as pretty and as empty.

The three instruments, so strangely matched, went off together in a variety of music, imparting to every thing an uncanny, ghostly flavor, as if these airs came in wild echoes from the shores of some dead past.

"Oh, stop that," Herman cried, at last. "It's too melancholy. Your instruments are all dead; and it's no use trying to get live music out of them."

For reply the German led off in a drearisome minor folk-tune, Rangely and Bently improvising their parts with some skill, albeit not always with perfect harmony.

"Ye Gods!" cried Ainsworth, seizing the mandolin out of the player's grasp. "Is this a Hottentot funeral? Here, Fred, give me that diabolical gourd; it is haunted by the soul of a Caffre medicine man."

"I say, fellows," spoke Rangely, as the din subsided, "I move we make this a funeral, by breaking up the Pagans. Of course there is nothing to

hinder our meeting round at each other's places whenever we want to; but we've either got to turn Fenton out or break up. I, for one, am coward enough to prefer to break up."

"So say I," said Herman. "When once a circle like this is broken, there is an end of it. It can't be patched together."

They looked at each other in silence a moment. To disband seemed like an acknowledgment of defeat. Many another band of ardent souls has known the feeling, with its dreary ache, although it oftener happens that a circle of this kind disappears by the gradual dropping away of its numbers one by one rather than that its members are brought face to face with the necessity of owning that its existence had resulted in failure. Whatever their faults and extravagances, whatever their errors and intolerance, they were sincere, self sacrificing and ardent beyond the men who made up the world about them; a group of eager lovers of truth and art who had been drawn together by mutual aims and enthusiasms. Their fierceness had been in defense of honesty and sincerity, their disinterestedness was attested by the fact that any one of them might have made his peace with Philistia and been rewarded for his complaisance had he so chosen. Doubtless they had their faults and foibles, yet their comradeship, in its essential purport had been true and noble.

They in no wise abandoned their aims in agreeing with the proposition to disband, but about their fellowship had been a certain unphrased tenderness, at which, if put in word, any one of them might have scoffed, yet which nevertheless they all felt strongly in their secret hearts, and all were conscious that after this defection of Fenton, the circle could never be perfect again. They did not discuss the matter now, but in the interval of silence each acknowledged to himself that to disband was best; and briefly each gave his assent; all soberly, some almost gruffly.

And so it came about that the goddess Pasht lost her last band of followers, and the Pagans assembled no more forever.

XXXVI.

AS FALSE AS STAIRS OF SAND.

Merchant of Venice ; v.—2.

"VERY likely you cannot see it," Arthur Fenton said, striking in the background of a portrait with vicious roughness. "Women and brutes differ from men in lacking reason ; if you were logical you'd see."

"See that you are right in selling your convictions for patronage," Helen returned gravely, ignoring the insult. "Then I am glad I am not logical."

"If you choose to put it that way," he retorted doggedly, "I must still say yes."

It was Friday morning, and Helen was to sail the next day. She had come to Fenton's studio to bid him good-by, knowing that they should have that to say which could not be freely spoken before Edith, and yet not choosing to have him come to her own house without his wife.

"Poverty," he went on aggressively, "is nature's protest against civilization, and still more against art. I am bound to fight nature on her own ground, am I not ?"

"If I were a little more orthodox," she replied,

"I might quote Scripture upon life's being some thing more than meat. Oh, Arthur, what is the use of all this fencing? All that is asked of you is to be honest; and to be honest the life of an artist in America to-day must be a protest against dominant Philistinism; nobody has ever acknowledged that oftener or more emphatically than you have."

"But the artists," returned he, not meeting her eyes, "are too self-centered. Look at the Pagans; what efforts have they ever made to win society? Society is ready enough to take them in."

"Arthur! Is it you who say that? To quote yourself against yourself, 'every work of art is an effort to conquer Philistinism.' Patronage seems already to have sucked the life out of you."

"You may say what you like," Fenton remarked defensively; "you cannot make me angry."

"That may be your misfortune," rejoined she sadly, "but I fear it is your fault."

"The sin of a thing," he said, putting down his brushes impatiently, "oftener consists in regarding it as a sin than in the thing itself."

He went to the round window, for his studio was high up in the building, and removed the Japanese umbrella which served as its screen. He threw himself upon a pile of cushions, regarding darkly the tops of the trees in the Old Granary burying-ground opposite.

"*Que voulez-vous?*" he demanded coolly, after

a moment's silence. "You are unreasonable; you always are. I must live. I don't know why you have a right to object to that. I have married a wife who is well connected, and I always meant to make her connections help me, Philistines or not. Even the godly Israelites made a virtue of spoiling the Egyptians."

"But that was in departing from their country."

"We won't argue," the artist declared sulkily. "Argument is only disputing about definitions, and we should never agree. I don't expect you to think I'm right. As a matter of fact I have my doubts myself. You might at least allow me the satisfaction of humbugging myself if I am able."

She regarded him sadly. The chance remarks about Edith's relatives seemed to throw a new and sinister light upon the reasons of his marriage. She wondered if she had not been mistaken in following her impulse to come here, and whether words could effect any thing.

"But Edith?" she said at length, and as if half to herself; "does not her honesty rebuke you? Don't you feel unworthy of her?"

"Well, and if her severe virtue does repel me?" he asked, a hard look coming into his face, "am I to blame for that also?"

"You are speaking of your wife!"

"*C'est vrai*," with a shrug, "but the one lie I never tell to or of any woman is that my passion for her will be eternal, and I am long ago tired of

Edith. Her innocence bores me. She urges me, too, to do precisely the things you condemn. And after all what is my crime? Simply that I am following the intelligence of the majority instead of being governed by the growls of the discontented minority, any one of whom would be glad of the chance to follow my example."

"It is not with whom you side," Helen answered. "It is the simple question of having the courage of your convictions. The dry rot of hypocrisy is ruining you. I can see Peter Calvin's smirk in every brush mark of your canvas there!"

For reply he threw a brush at the picture upon the easel. Then he sat upright in his cushions and faced her.

"Well," he ejaculated, half-angrily, half bitterly, "you are right. You cannot scorn me half as much as I scorn myself, and have ever since I asked Edith Caldwell to marry me. I meant then to make my peace with the Philistines!"

He sprang to his feet impetuously and shook himself as if to shake off some disgusting touch.

"I like a comfortable home at the West End," he continued impetuously, "far better than I do dreary bachelor lodgings, now here, now there. I prefer faring sumptuously every day, to dining in an attic. Whatever else may be said of that terrible Calvin—my God! Helen, how I would like to choke him!—he certainly has plenty of money, and he patronizes me beautifully."

He walked up to the easel and regarded the half-finished portrait contemptuously.

"Honesty," he began again with cool irony, "is doubtless a charming thing for digestive purposes, but it is a luxury too expensive for me. The gods in this country bid for shams, and shams I purpose giving them. I am not sure I shall not go into chromos eventually. I don't enjoy this especially, but after all that is a mere matter of standards, and I have resolved to change mine, so that I shall end by enjoying or even honoring my eminently respectable self. As for art, she is a jade that can't give her lovers even a fire to sit by while they woo her. I'm sorry for her, but I don't see clearly how I can help her by sitting down to starve in her company; so I've made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness—you see my orthodox education was not wholly lost upon me! *Voila tout!* Honesty, I say, is for the most part cant, and at any rate only a relative term. I prefer substantial good. If you despise me, *tant pis pour*—one of us; whichever you choose."

He spoke defiantly, but faltered a little at the last words. She rose as he finished.

"Good-by," she said. "You have taught me forever to distrust my own judgments, for I had mistaken you for a man! I am sorry that I have ever known you. You lower my respect for all the race."

"But I acknowledge my faults."

"Acknowledge!" she retorted in disdain. "What of that? Acknowledgment is not reparation, though many try to make it so."

She walked towards the door, but he reached it first and laid his hand upon the latch.

"You are going away," he said. "Who knows when we shall ever meet again. At least remember that I condemn myself as sharply as you can."

"That is the degradation of it," was her retort, her eyes blazing at him. "If you could plead ignorance, I could pity you."

"Edith is a saint," he went on, not heeding, "but her good is my evil. I do not plead it as an excuse; I have and I want no excuse; but it is true that temptation could come to me in no shape so insidious as through her sincerity."

"Then you will be honest!" pleaded Helen.

"I do not say that. I think I shall go on as I am; but I have changed my idea of my epitaph. It shall be only the word 'Pardon.'"

"Your old one was better," she retorted stingingly, "and better than either would be a blank! Let me pass!"

XXXVII.

FAREWELL AT ONCE, FOR ONCE, FOR ALL AND EVER.

Richard II.; ii.—2.

THE outward bound steamer was almost ready to sail, and all the bustle attendant upon departure of an ocean craft eddied about three people who stood in a half-sheltered nook upon the wharf. They were saying little. Both Grant Herman and Ninitta kept their eyes fixed upon Helen, while her glance was cast to the ground, save when she raised her head in speaking.

The Italian from time to time took Helen's hand in hers and kissed it fondly.

"I pray the Madonna for you every night," she whispered in her native tongue, "that she will give you a safe voyage."

The sculptor watched all that went on about them, waiting with some inward impatience for the moment when the duty of escorting Mrs. Greyson on board would give him an opportunity of being a moment alone with her.

"We shall miss you much," he said, feeling that any thing would be better than the silence which hedged them in amid the noisy bustle of the

throng. "We shall not soon fill your place, shall we, Ninitta?"

He did not listen to the eager answer; his eyes were fixed upon Helen's face, and for her alone he had ears.

"Yes," he said again with nervous platitude, when once more they had lapsed into the silence he found it so hard to bear; "neither my wife nor myself has any friend to take your place."

Some faint accent in the tone in which he referred to his three hours' bride made the widow look up suddenly. To the question in her eyes his glance gave no answer, and for the moment a feeling of despair overcame her. Had she given him up only to the end that his life should be miserable; had she forced him into a marriage whose bonds would gall and chafe him with more deadly and festering wounds as time went on?

But all these questionings Helen had answered with stern bravery during the sad wakeful nights and lonely days just past. She had first convinced herself that it was right that Herman should redeem his old-time pledge to Ninitta, and after that she forced herself to the bitterer task of realizing that when time had obliterated somewhat the clearness of her own image in the sculptor's heart, something of his old affection for the Italian might be rekindled in his generous, warm nature, always tenderly chivalrous towards woman, and sure to prove doubly so to one dependent upon him. It

was hard, but Helen unflinchingly analyzed the nature of her lover, and while she could not believe that he would ever feel for his wife the grand passion which she had herself inspired in his breast, she saw for him a tranquil future in which his wife's devotion would be met with enduring, even with increasing affection, which if not love, would be so like it that Ninitta, at least, would never distinguish; and in which her husband would find comfort and warmth, if not fire and aspiration.

She had a harder struggle when the thought came to her, "Have I not led him into the one thing he most dreads and despises, an act of insincerity? Can a loveless marriage be honest?" But she answered her doubting heart; "No; he has told Ninitta that he does not love her as of old, and he is not deceiving her. It is my own selfishness that puts this thought into my mind." It may be that Helen was wrong, for the influence of her Puritan training had left a strong impress upon her moral sense in a regard for the sanctity of a pledge, especially to its spirit rather than its letter, so deep as to be almost morbid; yet at least she was self sacrificing and never more truly consistent than in the seeming inconsistency of urging this marriage.

"Come," was Herman's word, almost a command, when the crowd upon the steamer's deck began definitely to separate into those who were

to go and those who remained. "You must go aboard. Ninitta, stand just where you are until I come back. I will be gone only an instant."

Helen turned and kissed Ninitta, a sharp pang stabbing her very soul, as the thought came to her: "He will love her; she is his wife, and he will learn to love her!" Then she put her arm upon Herman's in silence.

She had been alternately desiring and fearing this moment, until her excitement was almost beyond control. The sculptor led her on board the steamer, and together they descended to the saloon. Every body was on deck except the servants, and without difficulty a nook was found where the two were alone.

"Well," he said, breaking the silence with a voice full of emotion, "it is done, and we are parted as far as the earth is wide."

"No," she answered, clasping his hands in hers. "With a broken faith between us we should have been separated; now we are truly together, no matter how many oceans part us. It is hard; it is hard; but I know it must be right."

He bent forward to kiss her.

"No," she said, drawing back. "Your kisses belong to your wife, now. I have no right even to your thought. But I cannot help telling you, now we are parting, how much it is to me to love you. It is hard to leave you, Grant, to give you up; but now I understand that it is better to love,

even if we are not together, even though we may not belong to each other. And I cannot but find comfort in thinking that you will not forget me."

"But if hereafter," he began eagerly, but before the words were uttered he realized what they implied, and a hot flush of shame tinged his cheek. "No," he said, "I cannot think of the future."

She put up her hand with a gesture of appeal. The bell of the steamer sounded out sharply upon the air.

"No," she said. "We must say good-by with no reservations, no hopes, even with no prayers. It is simply and absolutely good-by. And oh!" she added, her voice breaking a little, "I do so hope for your happiness, though I must not share it."

He wrung her hand and left her. Once he halted, as if to return, but her gesture gave him so absolute a farewell that he went on. His wife awaited him where he had left her. She slipped her arm through his.

"I am so glad you have come back," she said in her soft Italian, lifting to his a face full of trust and love; "I was so lonely and afraid without you."

He was touched with a tender pity as he looked into her eyes. When he withdrew his glance the steamer was moving, and he saw Helen leaning over the rail.

She waved her hand, and as the ship glided away, down the harbor, these two, so separated, yet so united, clung together by their glances until distance shut them from each other's sight.

FINIS.

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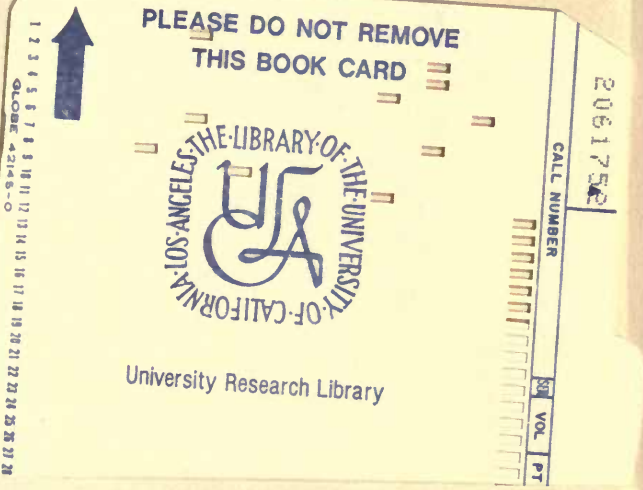
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